

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1915.—VOL. LXXIV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 13, 1900.

[PRICE ONE PENNY]



"DON'T LET ME DISTURB YOU, MISS MARY!" SAID CONOL, TAKING A SEAT BESIDE HER.

THE BARRIER REMOVED.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"A wee, wee mite,
With eyes of Heaven's blue,
And golden curls."

"Here's a pretty piece of business!" exclaimed Mrs. Roderick Macgregor, one bright winter's morning, looking up from the perusal of a letter she held across the breakfast-table, at her sandy-haired, freckled skinned, under-sized husband, who, standing in awe of his big, buxom wife, also looked up quickly with a guilty start from the surreptitious inspection of a rare insect that he had only the day before added to his collection, and, owing to her constant demands on his attention, had not yet been able to criticise comfortably and leisurely.

"What's the matter, my dear!" he asked,

amiably, with a smile that was just a trifle strained and ghostly.

"A great deal's the matter," she responded, tartly. "It wasn't enough for Ivor to die suddenly, and put us to the expense of mourning, but now Colonel Clavering writes that there isn't a penny for the child beyond the forty pounds a-year Kathleen left her, and he wants to find a home for her in England."

"Ah!" ejaculated Roderick, inwardly shivering at the tone and manner of his better half, for he knew it portended a storm.

"Ah!" she mimicked, in her strident tones. "Is that all you have to say about this precious pickle! Don't you see what it means!"

"No, my love! Will you explain!" he suggested, with abject meekness.

"It means," she went on, fiercely, "that this man, this Clavering, wants to foist this pauper child on us! That is, more correctly speaking, on me!"

"Yes, Marjorie. But—she is your niece," with extra hesitation and nervousness.

"Niece, or no niece, I won't have her living here," she declared.

"Then—hadn't—you—better—write and tell him so?"

"Too late! The brat has started already. He's sent her over in the care of an ayah, who has been to England three or four times."

"Then—what will you do?"

"Find someone who will take her in and look after her for the sum of forty pounds a-year."

"Your own brother's child!" exclaimed Macgregor, startled by such inhumanity out of his usual abject fear, and a servile obedience and acquiescence to all her wishes and plans.

"Don't brother's child me," she rejoined, sharply. "She's more Kathleen O'Hagan's child than Ivor's. A low creature, utterly beneath all of us."

"Oh, Marjorie! Her only fault was poverty. She was a perfect lady!"

"Just a man's verdict," with a sniff of con-

tempt, "because the girl happened to have a pair of blue eyes and a baby face!"

"No, no! Do be just," he implored.

"Am I ever anything else?" she asked, in awful tones, for if there was one thing more than another on which Mrs. Mac prided herself it was her religion, and Christian-like charity and benevolence.

Like the Pharisee of old, she was given to vaunting her piety, and making long prayers, and generally displaying an immense amount of humility and humbleness. But truly it was the devil's darling, "the pride that apes humility," for a more haughty, hard, arrogant, selfish woman never lived.

She ground down mercilessly all who came in contact with her, and to save a "saxpence" would often be guilty of a shameless piece of meanness.

Her servants hated her, acquaintances avoided her, and her relatives, being unable to escape entirely from her up-as-like presence, dreaded her; while her husband, whom it was currently reported she had married, and not he her, was scared almost out of the little wit he possessed by her constant nagging and bullying.

"Am I ever anything save just!" she repeated, in a still more awe-inspiring tone.

"No, no, my love, certainly not!" he hastened to acknowledge. "You are never anything but a perfect woman in my eyes!"

Poor, miserable little hypocrite!

"That's right!" with a smile of complacency, that displayed a whole row of projecting yellow bones to horrible disadvantage. "Anyway, I don't mean to have this baby here!"

"No, my dear, it would certainly be a great trial and trouble to you!"

"Certainly! I could not set up a nursery again. Stuart is five, remember, and Allen and James ten and fourteen. A baby twelve months' old would be a white elephant here!"

"Just so. A white elephant!"

"Therefore, I feel that I am only acting rightly, and with a due regard for the happiness and comfort of myself, you, and our boys in declining to have this infant here," looking at him with fierce and menacing interrogation, that made him hastily blurt out,—

"Certainly, certainly!"

"If the money the child possessed were greater I might, I don't say that I should, but I might tolerate her being in the same house with me, for then I could engage the services of a thoroughly competent nurse, who would take entire charge of her; but as she is next-door to a pauper the best thing to do is to put her with some honest, godly, country folk, and let her grow up to believe herself one of them!"

"Do—you—know—of any such folk?" inquired poor Roderick, his tender heart bleeding for the orphaned bairn, and yet not daring to try and alter or avert the hard and unfair disposition of her future.

"Yes, I think I do!" returned Mrs. Macgregor, smoothing down her black silk apron with a pair of bony, mittened hands.

"Who are they?"

"The Crowthers of Derryardor!"

"Your Essex friends?"

"Acquaintances!" she corrected, in slightly acidulated tones. "They are farm people, and therefore I could hardly call them friends, except in the Lord. Patience is a godly woman and an ornament to her sex."

"I see!" he mumbled, miserably, wondering what kind of a life the little Anglo-Indian walt would have with the "godly ornament to her sex."

"I shall go down and see them to-morrow."

"So soon?" he ejaculated.

"Yes! Kathleen O'Hagan's child" (she resolutely ignored the fact of its being her brother's also) "will arrive in England a fortnight from to-day. It will be necessary to have all arrangements made, everything ready for its reception."

"Of course!"

"Then when I have told Lawyer Greaves to pay the forty pounds, in quarterly instalments, to Patience Crowther, I shall be able to wash my hands of the whole affair and breathe freely,

knowing the child will have no further claim on me."

"Yes, if they take her."

"They will!" shutting her mouth like a steel trap. "I'll manage that," and she did.

The next day she started from Liverpool Street, and, after a run of three or four hours, alighted at Winden, which was the nearest station to Derryardor; then, disdaining the invitations of the solitary flyman and the bus conductor, she gathered up her skirts, and stepped out for the five-mile walk that lay before her. On she strode, her mind busy, wondering what she could make out of her little niece, what hint she could give the Crowthers that a dozen or two of their new-laid eggs would be very acceptable now and then, or a brace of plump chickens, and she was so engrossed with her mercenary calculations that she had not a glance to spare for the flat marshland lying around, dotted sparsely here and there with cottages and farmsteads.

Of these, the most important was Castle Farm, so called because it stood on a slight eminence—looked upon almost as a mountain in that flat land—and because originally it had been one of Henry the Eighth's coast castles. There was not a great deal of the original building left. The farm house, built about the time of Queen Anne, stood facing seaward, hiding the ruined stonework of Bialf Hal's period, the antiqueness of which was spoiled by having modern cow and pig houses built up against it, and decidedly Victorian roofs on each of the walls as were safe and able to bear them. It was surrounded by a fairly high, grey stone wall, loop-holed, of great depth and strength, outside of which was the dry moat, and thick belt of trees—trees that could be seen far and near, for there were not many in that wide marshland, and being few and far between those of Castle Farm were conspicuous and a landmark.

Beyond the moat lay the pastures, green and fair, for old Peter Crowther had been wealthy, and dyked his land and cut creeks, and spent much in keeping out the ever-encroaching ocean, whose salt waves rushing over the grass acres spoiled and ruined them, leaving them hardly fit for the cattle to browse on, and half-a-mile further in lay the corn and grain lands that he had cultivated with such care and trouble until they surpassed any in the county, or, at all events, those lying near the sea-coast and abutting on the marshes.

His barns and granaries were filled to overflowing, his stables and sheds full, his pens, styes, and poultry-yard well stocked—everything prosperous and flourishing. So when he died his only son, Jim, stepped into a good thing, for all came to him save two thousand pounds, which Peter left respectively to his other two children, Patience and Prudence, both considerably older than their half-brother, Jim being the Benjamin of the family, the offspring of his father's old age.

Jim was five when old Crowther died, Patience forty-five, and Prudence thirty-five. The other numerous children who came before Patience, and after her and before Prudence, died of ague, marsh fever, and other damp-produced diseases. The young people were all able to carry on the farming operations commenced by their father, and did so, and the sisters never dreamt of taking their little fortunes out of the concern. All they cared for was their step-brother's welfare and prosperity, so they all lived together as before, Patience managing the household matters, Prudence superintending the dairy and poultry-yard, and all going smoothly at the quaint Tador farmstead.

Of love and marriage, neither Patience or Pru ever thought for themselves. They were plain-faced, middle-aged, commonplace women, and had the sense to know that if a wooer came he would be courting their money, and not them. So they interested themselves in their daily labours, and sought in every way to further their beloved step-brother's interests. That he might marry some day they thought just possible, nothing more.

Of course, it would not be for years; and when he did it would naturally, they argued, be a

woman like themselves, of the useful, not ornamental type; and then they would laugh to think of matrimony for a boy, and turn to and work all the harder at their several occupations.

It was a busy household, and when Mrs. Macgregor rapped loudly with her umbrella at the old half-studded oak door, Prudence came to open it with her dress pinned back and her sleeves rolled up to the elbow, for she was busy churning.

"Mrs. Macgregor! Lor, sakes alive! What brings ye doon hither!" she exclaimed, her round, good-natured face beaming with pleasure, for visitors at the farm were like angels, few and far between; and Pru was worldly enough to like a chat with a body from town, and hear news of that outer world from which she was to a great extent shut off.

"Business," rejoined the Scottish matron, tersely, for in her slim, pharisaical eyes poor Pru was but a wandering sheep straying from the right fold, and full of carnal desires and unholy longings.

As a matter of fact, the younger Miss Crowther was a sweet-tempered, honest, unselfish soul, and, not having been crossed in love, like her sister, did not take a jaundiced view of all things and all people, but was ready to be pleased and amused by very simple and innocent things; but then she did not interlard her conversation with quotations from scripture, nor openly boast of her magnificence if she gave an old flannel petticoat or a pair of boots to a poor woman. Her charity was of that kind which letteth not the left hand know what the right hand doeth; and, moreover, she was lenient to sinners and backsliders, and therefore found no favour with her sister's hard-hearted friend.

"Business!" she echoed. "With Patience, of course!"

"Of course," responded Mrs. Mac, flatly.

"Where is she?"

"Gettin' dinner ready; it's nigh upon one o'clock. But come in, you're rarely welcome. She'll be here in a minute, when she knows who it is," as she ushered the guest into the best parlour, sweet with the smell of dried lavender and rose leaves, and gorgeous with gay-coloured antimacassars and starting prints.

"Go and call your sister, please," ordered Marjorie Macgregor, sinking into an easy-chair, with an affectation of extreme weariness which she did not feel, for her bony frame was capable of enduring far greater fatigue than a five-mile walk.

Only she did not want to waste time talking to Pru, who bustled away in no end of a hurry to the red-tile floored kitchen, where the rows of pewter mugs shone like silver, and reflected the ruddy fire glow; and the dresser was scrubbed snow-white, and showed off its burden of old, blue, willow-pattern china finely, and where all were busy preparing the meal for the hungry farm-workers, soon expected in from their daily labours.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Miss Crowther, pausing for an instant from her occupation of beating a huge joint that turned slowly round and round on the spit, and showing her sister a glimpse of her hard, unlovely face, now more unlovely than usual, as it was flushed to a dull red by the heat of the fire.

"Visitor!" announced the young sister, with an approach to a giggle.

"Visitor, indeed; and at this time o' the mornin'."

"What next, I wonder!" exclaimed the mistress of Castle Farm, letting the big spoon fall with a clatter into the pan, and seizing on a big saucepan of potatoes to shake, as a little vent for her wrath.

"You won't be argered when you know who it is has come hither," declared Pru.

"No! That remains to be seen."

"It's Mrs. Macgregor."

"Marjorie Macgregor!" repeated the other, in surprise. "What in the world brings her hither!"

"Business with you, Sister Patience."

"With me! It's to rescue some soul from the burning, I make no doubt. Here, Polly," as she divested herself of the big apron, and le

down her sleeves over her muscular arms, "take the spoon, and don't ye let the meat burn while I'm away. Now, Pru, move yourself, and get dinner served for the farm folk, and some sent up to the parlour for Mrs. Mac an' ourselves, as soon as convenient."

And having given these directions, she hurried off to greet her guest.

"I'm right glad to see ye," she declared, grasping the Scotch woman's bony hand in a strong grasp.

"And I to see you," returned the other, with a sanctimonious air and drawl. "The servants of the Lord are not often to be met with now."

"True," agreed Miss Crowther, with a groan.

"The world grows worse, and worse. More depravity, more ungodliness day by day. It's a treat to talk with one as is not past redemption like yourself. It behoves a body to be careful who they prattle with and knows these times."

"It does!" solemnly assented Mrs. Mac. "And that is why I have come to you in my dilemma."

"Dilemma! Why, what's the matter?"

"A good deal. I've a baby left on my hands!"

"A baby!" echoed the other, blank astonishment visible on her face.

"Yes, a baby!" nodding her head, till the flaunting poppies in her bonnet waggled backwards and forwards at no end of a rate.

"Where, ma'am, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"My brother's—Ivor Stewart."

"Sakes alive! Is his pretty wife dead?"

"Ay, and he too."

"Lore!"

"Heaven grant they may have entered into that everlasting rest which they scarcely deserved, poor, feckless souls!" with a sanctimonious snort.

"Amen!" responded Patience, devoutly.

"Ay, Amen!"

"And their child?" inquired Miss Crowther, with some interest, for she had a vivid recollection of the golden-haired, blue-eyed, fairy-like little creature Mr. Stewart had married.

"Their child," returned Mrs. Mac, in awful tones, "is left on my hands, on my charity!"

"Bless my soul!"

"You may well say that. This infant of twelve months is foisted upon me, and I have to provide for it!"

"It's hard!" exclaimed Patience, hardly knowing which way the wind of her friend's ideas blew, "to provide for another's child when ye have some of ye'er own to fettle for!"

"Hard! It's infamous!" declared the Scotch-woman, wrathfully. "My youngest is nearly six, going to school; my nursery is dismantled; my course dismantled; my time occupied with my parish work, my mother's meeting, my deserving unemployed's soup kitchen, my mission for the distribution of suitable clothing to the nude negroes of the Gold Coast, and the propagation of the Gospel of Light amongst the Hottentots—I haven't a moment to spare. My whole time is given up to the service of the Lord!"

"Yes, yes! Ye're a godly woman," acknowledged the other, readily, only across her half-educated brain for an instant flashed the thought that it might be "Lord's work" to look after the motherless babe, "for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Besides," grumbled Marjorie Macgregor, bent upon carefully concealing the fact that the little orphan had forty pounds a year, "it will take all my surplus cash to keep her, and I dearly love to give what I can to our beloved pastor—the Rev. Hypocritum Dothemwell!"

"Of course. Right ye are. We should give all we can to them as are the chosen ministers of our Heavenly Father!"

"Well, I shan't have much to spare in the future!"

"He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord."

"Ay, true!" with a hypocritical sigh. "I shall throw my bread upon the waters!"

"And ye'll gain ye'er reward!"

"I hope so! Only—Patience Crowther!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

"There's one thing as plain as the New Testament!"

"An' what's that?"

"I can't have Kathleen O'Hagan's child brought up with my dear boys!"

"No?" doubtfully and inquiringly.

"No," fixing her light gold eyes on the other woman's face.

"Then what will you do with the child?"

"Get some kind, Christian friend to take her, clothe, feed, and provide for her for the sum of ten pounds a quarter—forty pounds per annum!"

"Forty pounds per annum!" echoed the other.

"Ay! There's a deal of spending in that, isn't there?" unctuously.

"J—I—I'm not so sure, when there's a little one to provide for. They take a mortal lot o' clothes—and things," thinking of Jim's small, fat feet, that persisted in getting chubbier and chubbier every day, and growing too big for his boots with alarming rapidity.

"Yes, where there's only one. Where there are two the younger can wear out the elder's old things," insinuated Mrs. Mac, craftily.

"True."

"Now, Patience," she went on, boldly and volubly, feeling she must speak out. "You are my friend, have been my friend in holiness and righteousness these twenty years and more. I therefore turn to you in my distress. I appeal to you to help to save this soul from the burning. My husband is a weak man; he will spoil, pamper, and ruin this child. He has long yearned with a most unholily longing—since it was a plain dispensation of Providence—for a daughter. I shall be unable to interfere; she will be lost utterly, and, moreover, my good work will be interrupted, and perhaps stopped altogether, if I have to give all my time to this child. Now you have a baby brother and a stout wench I know to mind him. I ask you, therefore, to take Mary Stewart and forty pounds a-year for her keep, and do the best you can with it. Make it go as far as it will; and then let her wear his cast-off clothes—those he has grown out of."

"Lor, sakes alive! A lady's child wear out Jim's cast-off cloaks; I never did," ejaculated Patience, who, though scoured by an early disappointment, and tinged with some of that stern and fanatical idea of religion and the duties of life which she inherited from her Puritanical forefathers, who had been staunch adherents of Cromwell, still at heart was a good woman, if stern and forbidding outwardly, and, moreover, upright and honourable enough to be just a little shocked at Mrs. Mac's barely concealed anxiety to get rid of her little niece at any price, to wash her hands, and be rid of her for ever.

"Yes. Why not?" demanded the Scottish matron, sternly. "The child is a pauper" (oh, for the veracity of the Christian-like woman!) "She has nothing to look forward to, absolutely nothing, while Jim will some day hold a certain position among the landed folk of the neighbourhood. Besides, Patience, think how you could train this young soul in the way in which it should go."

"Ah! that's something," murmured Miss Crowther, thoughtfully.

"Something! It's a great deal!" and then Mrs. Mac brought the whole artillery of her forces to bear on Patience; and Pru being called in to join in the counsel, and being wild with delight at the mere idea of having a blue-eyed girl baby to live at the farm; in this and the matter was arranged, greatly to the satisfaction of Mrs. Roderick Macgregor, who returned to town in a contented frame of mind, to think that her useful mission to the nude negroes need not suffer through the advent of the little motherless child.

CHAPTER II.

"A babe asleep with flower soft face that gleamed To sun and seaward as it laughed and dreamed, Too sure of either love for either's fear, Albeit so birdlike, slight and light."

In due time Mary Stewart arrived at her aunt's

dismal, dingy town abode, accompanied by a swarthy Bengalee, whose magnificent black hair was twisted in a great shining mass at the top of her head, and fastened there by two golden arrows, while a jewel of some value nestled comfortably in her left nostril; bangles adorned her wrists and ankles, and, altogether, with her white flowing garments, she presented a most picturesque appearance; but in Mrs. Mac's severe eyes she was altogether outlandish and heathenish, a brand not to be snatched from the burning, a lost sheep; and she got rid of the devoted creature with amazing celerity, ensuring her a free passage back to India by recommending her, in extravagant terms, to a lady of position, with whom she was slightly acquainted, who was returning to Bengal with two children.

That done, she lost no time in transferring the little blue-eyed mite to the Essex farmstead, where she was received with raptures by Pru, quiet delight by six year-old Jim, and a certain amount of well-simulated satisfaction by Patience, who, however, having been denied the pains and pleasures of marriage and maternity, knew nothing whatever of the management of young and sensitive children; and who had allowed Pru to manage their baby brother in conjunction with a buxom, blooming, good-natured girl from the village, just because she felt she would be all abroad if she attempted to manage him herself, and that she would lose her temper, which was proverbially short.

"We must bring the little lass up well, sister!" she said, solemnly, gazing at the beautiful little creature, whose great clear blue eyes wandered hither and thither full of curiosity.

"Of course, Patience."

"And in the fear and admonition of the Lord."

"Yes," dubiously.

"Strictly, and with rigid moral discipline, and otherwise, if so be we find it necessary, stern control."

"Oh! sister, no!" broke out the younger woman. "Stern control for this little angel—never a day of it! For, sakes alive! she couldn't stand it. 'Twould break her little heart. Heaven bless her!"

And she caught up the mite from the rug on which she was sitting, and swung her aloft, and kissed her, and cooed to her, and patted the rosy, dimpled fists, and played until the small creature crowed and kicked with delight; and even Miss Crowther's stern features relaxed into the semblance of a smile, and Jim giggled and choked with bursts of laughter.

"Mooker!" cried Miss Mary, in imperative baby tones.

"What does she mean?" asked the mistress of Castle Farm, somewhat helplessly.

"Milk," returned Pru, promptly; "and of course she shall have it, for she's a duck!"

And forthwith she bore her off to the dairy, closely followed by Jim, who clung on to her skirts with both fat hands to make sure of not being left behind, and gave her some of the rich milk in a mug that was her brother's special property, and showed her the pats of yellow butter, and the awans, and tubs, and balls and queer devices she made it into; and the bunches of herbs hanging from the ceiling, and the great brass pans full of cream, and the churns with their double handles; and the wee stranger enjoyed it all, and appreciated Pru's kindness.

And that was the beginning of an immeasurable love and affection between the two, that grew and strengthened as the years passed swiftly on. And the old homestead was made merry by the patter of baby feet, and the sweet joyous ring of baby laughter, as the little one grew from an infant to a child, wondrously beautiful, with a skin like cream, just tinted with a rose hue; and hair that seemed to have caught the sunbeams captive; and eyes dark, large, full of innocent wonder and innocent mirth.

Undoubtedly the little orphan brought sunshine to the farm. Everyone loved her, and Miss Crowther became wonderfully softened by her influence, and secretly loved her dearly, only she never would admit it, and did her best to be stern and strict; but she failed miserably, and

always gave in to the child's whim or fancy. While as to good Pru, who got stouter and stouter day by day, despite her vigorous churning and other hard work, she simply gloated over this treasure that had come in her way, and which made the sunshine of the honest creature's life, and did her best to spoil her, making her little room at the Farmstead a perfect bower of prettiness, with dainty little trifles, and yards of white muslin and pale blue calico, that she purchased at Winden whenever she paid a visit there, and for which occasion she saved up all her spare cash, which was not much, for Patience managed the money matters and kept her short, telling her that the children's education took a "most o' money," which explanation quite satisfied Pru. And to do Miss Crowther justice, she gave both Jim and Mary the benefit of the excellent schools at Winden until they were respectively twelve and seventeen. Then she had her brother home to instruct him in the mysteries of farming, and obtained a tutor, who came three times a week to finish him off in languages, &c., while she also let Mary have the benefit of the reverend gentleman's knowledge, and, besides, secured the services of a decayed and impoverished gentlewoman, residing at Winden, who came twice a week with clockwork-like regularity—half, rain, or snow—and taught the girl to play old-fashioned pieces at the old-fashioned spinet in the parlour, and warble old-fashioned songs, which, despite their age and antiquity, sounded very sweet, sung by the clear, youthful voice.

Patience Crowther was doing her duty. She wished her half-brother to be a gentleman as far as he could, and able to enjoy the money that her care of their land and interests, and her father's before her, had made for him; while as to Mary Stewart, she was a lady bred and born, and it was only fair that she should have every advantage that lay in the stern old woman's power to give her, though the forty pounds a year sent for her expenses fell far short of the mark when her education had to be paid for. However, she seemed to be quite one of them, and they had grown to look on her as though she was their own flesh and blood, for by degrees Mrs. Mac had ceased to come to the Essex farmstead, and sent the money through her lawyer, not wishing the little orphan to claim kinship with her, while the child firmly believed herself their niece; and, as no one took the trouble to undeceive her, in time it became current in the neighbourhood that she was some relation of theirs kept out of charity, and her real origin was entirely lost sight of, though her delicate, fairy-like beauty was in strong contrast to the Crowther's large swarthyness, though Jim was a fine, tall, good-looking fellow, in a not very aristocratic style, at twenty-one, and thoroughly good-natured, whilst his brotherly affection for pretty Mary Stewart was rapidly warming into something stronger and more passionate.

And no wonder, for at sixteen she was as charming a girl as could be seen in a day's march, with pretty manners and taking ways, and not a shadow of rustic shyness, or a *soupeon* of the country bumpkin about her, though she was modest and retiring, and unused to society or its tricky ways, subterfuges, and shams.

"I heard the nightingale last evening!"

It was afternoon. A dreamy stillness reigned at Castle Farm, for the chief labour and bustle of the day was over; and Mary sat by the open window, through which the soft, fresh breeze blew in, laden with the scent of the purple violets that bloomed in the bed just below, gazing out over the meadows towards the village, whose red roof-tops were visible here and there through the swiftly-leaving trees.

"The nightingale!" she echoed, in surprise, turning her deep blue eyes on Jim, who sat near her on the broad window-seat.

"Yes; actually a solitary Philomel!"

"It is very early for him!"

"Yes, I suppose it is. As a rule, he is not heard before the middle of April."

"And this is only the beginning of the month!"

"Even so. We have hardly done with—"

Amazonian March, with breast half bare,
Whose fleet arrows whistling through the air,

oh! And here is the attic-bird, with 'amorous descent,' prime tenoring in the copples!"

"Jim," said his companion, looking at him gravely, "you've learnt and read too much. You'll never make a good farmer; never keep everything going on as aunt, pa, and Pru have!"

"What an insinuation!" he laughed. "I shall be all right when I am settled," and he in his turn looked at her, a world of longing in his soft brown eyes, "and shall blossom into a wonderful fellow at beavers, and hogs, and fowls; of course, not equal to the sisters. They are beyond competition; but I hope not a bad sort."

"I hope so too. It would never do to let the prosperity of the dear old place go down!"

"You like it?" he queried, eagerly.

"I love it!" she answered, quickly, looking round at the quaint room, with its shoulder-high wood wainscot, its tall mantelpiece, liberally adorned with grotesque china figures and dogs; at the grandfather's clock, ticking away in a corner with monotonous regularity, and the wide hearth, where a woodfire glowed, for the evenings were still chilly, and a kettle hissed and sang merrily. "The only home I have ever known!" she added, in lower tones, for she had now and then a hazy notion that some person or persons somewhere about in the world belonged to her, and that the Crowthers were not the only people in the universe with whom she was connected. But these notions were vague and undefined, unreal and evanescent as smoke, and dispersed at Jim's next words.

"The only one you ever need know" he put in quickly.

"It is very good of you to say that, Jim!" gratefully.

"Good of me!" he cried, passionately. "Why, what would the farm be without you?"

"I don't do much good—don't help much!" she remarked, diffidently.

"Do much good! You make the sunshine of our lives! Is that nothing?"

"Oh, Jim!" while a blush rose to the creamy pallor of her cheek as she met his ardent gaze.

"We couldn't do without you."

"Perhaps you will have to some day," smiling up at him.

"What do you mean, Mary?" while a sudden pain, the first of many and many an after-twinning, shot through his heart.

"You will marry some day, Jim," she answered, quietly, "and then, when you have a wife to share all your pains and pleasures, you won't want me or anyone else here to mar your perfect happiness and content!"

"I shall always want you," he returned, firmly, "no matter what betide; and, Mary, there is only one woman in the world I could make my wife. I think you know who she is!" pointedly. "No other would satisfy me—no other, in my eyes, would be fitting mistress for the old farmstead, and sharer of my life!"

Perhaps she did know, for again the blush mantled over the fair face, and the white lids drooped over the bright eyes, but she made no response; for though she cared for Jim dearly, as yet she was "fancy free," and far from desirous of becoming a wife, though it had crossed her mind that in the years to come, when time had brought wisdom to her golden head, and she wanted rest and peace, she would find it in Jim Crowther's love and home. Still, she was little more than a child.

"Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood sweet."

And the thought of his love and the passion in his eyes when he looked at her frightened her sometimes, and she was glad when the door opened and Patience and Pru entered, fresh from their expedition to Winden, where they went every market-day.

"Sakes alive, children (Miss Crowther still called them children), sitting with the window open this chilly day!"

"I have felt quite warm, aunt!" expostulated Mary, rising to kiss them both, which caresses Jim envied and coveted.

"All the more reason you shouldn't sit in a

draught!" snapped the old woman. "Jim, what were ye thinking o' to let her be there?"

"It never struck me it would harm her," replied the young man, shutting down the window, however, as a sign from his sister.

"Those sort o' things should strike ye, boy. Ye're too much o' a dreamer, me lad; it's time ye woke up to the realities o' life!"

"He'll wake up soon enow," put in Pru, with unconscious, but prophetic assurance. "Never you fear, Sis, there's time enow" for him. He's but a staggering Robert yet!" by which elegant simile the good creature meant that he was only a young calf.

"I shall rouse up when I'm wanted," he said, with a smile, and quick glance at Mary. "At present my rôle seems to be that of ornamental, not useful."

"You're conceited enough, at any rate," retorted his elder sister, but an answering smile lit up her grim and rugged features. "And now let us have tea, dearies!" and obediently the girl arranged the quaint Derby tea-set on the oak table, and, assisted by a buxom, rosy-cheeked country girl, cut a heaped-up plate of bread-and-butter, and toasted the home-made cakes; and when all was ready, and they drew up round the table, sugared and creamed the tea to a misty, and handed it round, and, while she was thus occupied, Jim watched her with loving eyes, and thought in his heart that "a fairer maid the sun had ne'er shone on."

CHAPTER III.

A stately family, the twentieth square,
Proud of his blue blood and only son,
Heir to his wealth and many acres,
And the old time-worn ancestral home.

A FEW evenings later Mary sauntered out with Jim, at the latter's invitation, to hear Philomel warble in the thicket at Quaker's Spring, a place some two miles distant from Castle Farm, and part of the property of Squire Courtney, the bigwig of the neighbourhood—a man looked up to and revered, partly on account of his great wealth and high position, partly by reason of his stern integrity and honourable uprightness, that was above and beyond reproach.

"Has the Squire come back from Italy?" asked Mary, as they passed the Court, as his place was called.

"I haven't heard," answered her companion; "but there seems to be more bustle than usual about the place," and he glanced at the Squire's home. It had originally been a castle, and the keep and some of the old rooms were still in a state of good preservation. Part was ruined, and the new building had crept up as the old one crumbled away, under its mantle of ivy; and all looked picturesque and pleasant, as the declining rays of the sun shone redly on its many-paned windows and hoary stonework, and grand oaks, and giant beeches, and other old trees that had stood the wear and tear, the storm and sunshine of centuries.

A river ran through the grounds, brawling merrily over the lichen-covered stones, and, in its clear pools, trout were to be found in abundance, and in the preserves, lying at the back, the feathered denizens of the wood congregated in multitudes—from the soul-thrilling lark, that soared singing to the very gates of Heaven, down to the sober brown-coated partridge, that formed such a nice addition to the Squire's table.

The place had been in the Courtney family from time immemorial, and they were justly proud of their old and famous heritage, and prouder of their blue blood. Indeed, pride was their stumbling-block and rock of offence, and old Robert Courtney was proud to the last degree; but ramour said that his only child, Conal, differed slightly from his ancestors, and was largely imbued with the liberal and levelling tendencies of the day.

"Yes," agreed Mary, as she, too, glanced at the grey walls, "the young Squire is expected, isn't he?"

"Yes. He got a nasty scratch in the skirmish

with one of the hill tribes, and has been given a year's sick leave of absence."

"Poor fellow!" murmured the girl, softly.

"Do you remember him?" asked Jim, jealously. He could not bear to think of her having anything to do with another man.

"Hardly," she answered, with a smile. "He has been away ten years. I was six when he went!"

"And he used to come to the farm once in two months!" exclaimed the young man, delightedly.

"So I have heard you say."

"He's a right down good sort!"

"Is he?" a little indifferently, pulling at a piece of may that was just beginning to bud from the hedge.

"Yes. No nonsense of position and pedigree about him. He used to come and make kites for me, and fly them too with me, just as if I were his equal!"

"And, so you are, Jim, I have no doubt, in most respects," answered his companion.

"No, Mary; I'm not such a fool as to think that," replied the young fellow, seriously. "I saw him three weeks ago when I was in London, and a splendid looking fellow he is!"

"You never told me!" she exclaimed, for from the earliest days they had been wont to tell each other everything.

"No—I didn't—tell you," he stammered, flushing, for he felt he could not admit that he hated to hear her speak of any young man.

"How did you recognise him?" she asked, fixing her clear eyes on his face.

"He knew me first, and stopped me; the moment he spoke and smiled, I knew him."

"Still he must have altered a good deal!"

"Of course, so he has. He was twenty-two when his regiment went to India. Ten years in a hot climate naturally make great alterations in a person, and then he has more moustache, and looks more manly and matured."

"He is handsome, isn't he?" she asked, dreamily, for across the mists of the past came the memory of a dark, handsome face that used to smile at her, and the owner of which used to bring her *dragées* and *bonbons ad lib.*

"Yes," returned her companion, a trifle sullenly. "But here he is. You can judge of his looks for yourself," and Jim motioned down the road, where a man, riding on a big white horse, was coming leisurely along, his left arm in a case along across his breast.

"Ah, Crowther! Good evening!" said the horseman, pleasantly, as he met them.

"Good evening, Squire; glad to see you home again!" returned Jim.

"Thanks. All well at the farm?"

"Yes, thank you."

"And this?" as his dark eyes fell on the girl's fair face. "Is this little Miss Mary, who used to search my pockets for sweets whenever I came to the farm?"

Again Jim said "yes," and Mary stretched out her hand and placed it in his offered one, smiling in return at his question.

"Time has made a considerable alteration in you, Miss Stewart!" he remarked, looking at her with respectful, yet undisguised admiration.

"Do you think so?" she murmured, slightly confused by the steady glance of those dark eyes.

"I do, indeed," he returned. "But for the blue eyes and yellow hair I should not have known you."

"It is well that I possess those distinctive attributes," she responded, with a ready gracefulness, and a purity of speech, that pleased and surprised him.

"They are certainly attributes not to be despised," he smiled.

"And how are your acres getting on?" addressing Jim, who stood silent.

"Very well indeed, thanks to my sisters!"

"Oh, is Miss Crowther as energetic as ever?"

"Quite—more so, I think!"

"Wonderful woman! And Miss Prudence, is her better still famous in the neighbourhood, and her picklets a matter for wonderment?"

"Oh, yes!" put in Mary quickly, glad to be able to speak well of the woman who had been

so devoted to her. "Her butter is delicious. I always tell Aunt Prue when I churn it: it is not nearly so!"

"Then this beautiful creature is a near relative of the Crowthers," thought Conol, and a momentary and incomprehensible feeling of regret shot across his mind. Aloud, he said, gallantly,—

"I am sure when you churn, the butter must be simply perfect!"

Jim did not hear this speech, and he was flattered and pleased when the young Squire said he should come up to the farm in a day or two to see his sisters, and renew his acquaintance; and then making his address rode slowly up the rode and through the great bronze gates by the park lodge, managing his horse with wonderful skill, considering he had only one hand to do it with.

"What do you think of him?" demanded Jim abruptly, almost savagely.

"I suppose he is very nice," returned the girl, dreamily; "but we can hardly judge of his class. We are different from those with whom he associates; and we have little in common with such as him!"

"You are right!" he agreed, energetically, pleased at her apparent indifference, and openly acknowledged sense of the wide difference that lay between the blue-blooded last scion of an old house and mere farm folk. "There's little in common between us!" and then, neither feeling inclined to hear the nightingale, they retraced their steps, and reached Castle Farm just as the cloth was being laid for supper.

CHAPTER IV.

"To-morrow may follow the flight of the swallow,
Who seeks for the land of the palm and the grove;
Or shadow the world with the frown of the scrow;
But to-day—ah! to-day, I have lived, and I love!"

CONOL COURTNEY was not long before he found his way to Castle Farm. He came in the afternoon of an early May-day; and with the assurance of old habit, and the certainty of a warm welcome, strode straight across the trim lawn, and looked in at the parlour-window.

Mary was sitting there, making a dainty white apron, and she lifted her eyes with a quick start as his shadow fell athwart the sunshine and darkened the room.

"It is Mr. Courtney, aunt," she said quietly, to Pru, as she extended her hand in welcome.

"I hope I'm not intruding!" said Conol, in his pleasant, refined tones.

"Intruding! Oh dear no, sir. We are only too glad to see you!" declared the second Miss Crowther, whose ideal of manly beauty was, and had been ever since he was fifteen years old, the young Squire. "After all these many years, too! Deary, deary me, you are changed!"

"Not for the worse, I hope!" he laughed.

"Certainly not, sir, as far as looks go," she responded promptly, and though he was pleased at the compliment—for no one is ever too wise, or too proud, or too good, or too anything to be above the reach of flattery—he still felt an unaccountable sense of annoyance at her calling him "sir." She was aunt to this beautiful girl with the heavenly eyes, and yet her position in regard to him was such that she called him "sir," as a servant or dependent might.

He didn't like it, though he had not in the least objected to being treated with old-fashioned respect and courtesy by the Castle Farm folk in bygone days; but then Mary Stewart was not sitting by attentively regarding him, and Prudence with her stupid eyes.

"You think I may have in other respects!" he went on, lightly.

"I don't know, but I hope not, for the Squire's sake. Come in, though, if you don't mind stepping through the window!"

He didn't mind in the least, and leapt nimbly through the clumsy, low window into the delightful dusky old parlour, that wore such a pleasant home-like aspect, with its queer furniture and antique, spindle-legged little tables,

bearing bowls of freshly gathered spring blooms, the perfume of which mingled subtly with the scent of dried lavender and rose leaves.

"Just as charming as ever!" he said, lightly, as he threw himself into a great chippendale chair opposite Mary. "Nothing changed."

"Not much," agreed Pru, looking at him, and the girl looked too, for to her unsophisticated eyes this man appeared to be a sort of Sir Galahad. Conol Courtney was still in his early prime, dark-faced, dark-eyed, with a heavy moustache that concealed the contour of his mouth, and curly brown hair that waved crisply over his white forehead. He was tall, well-proportioned, and muscular, and in all respects a fine specimen of manhood, and one likely to win a girl's heart before she had time to think about it.

"Time generally makes sad ravages and alterations!"

"True, sir; but we are old-fashioned folk, and cling to our old ways and things."

"Conservative, I see. A very good plan too in these days of levelling and alteration. He, however, has made a great difference in your place," turning his dark eyes on Mary in a way that made her blush redly, though she could not tell why.

"Yes," returned Pru, making a queer little motion of dissent at the same time with her hands, for the honest creature often felt a twinge to think that Mary should be classed as one of them, when in reality she was a lady, and of a good old aristocratic family, the male members of which had nearly all distinguished themselves in the army, and won brilliant laurels on many a bloody field of battle. Still she lacked the courage and perhaps the inclination to acknowledge that her cherished nursing was really no relation, and said nothing as to her parentage. "At her time a few years make a world of difference."

"They do, indeed. I suppose you are an adept at all the culinary arts, Miss Stewart?" he queried.

"My aunts have taught me a good deal," she returned, modestly, "but I shall never be able to do things as well as they do."

"Nonsense, child! You do it better," cried Pru. "There isn't one to match her in the neighbourhood," she went on enthusiastically to Conol. "Not only can she churn and make bread, and roast and boil with the best of them, but she can bring up chicks and ducks and such-like things; understands a good deal about horses and cattle, and harvesting; and then, sir, you should hear her speak French and sing Italian songs! My word, her voice is like a lark's!"

"Oh, aunt; how can you!" exclaimed the blushing and confused girl.

"It's the truth," declared the elder woman, stoutly.

"I am sure it is," chimed in the young Squire; "and I shall hope before long to hear you sing."

Mary was saved the trouble of a reply for at that minute the door opened, and Miss Crowther came in.

"And how do you do, Miss Prudence?" exclaimed Conol, who never knew the difference between the two sisters, for they were wonderfully alike, only Patience's mouth went in and shut like a steel trap, while Prudence's stuck out, and was always slightly open.

"I am Miss Crowther!" announced the mistress of the farm, impressively.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed the young man, hastily. "I am always stupid at remembering names, &c., and you and your sister are so much alike."

"So we are," allowed Patience, secretly delighted at being taken for a woman ten years younger than herself. "And folks be apt to make like mistakes to yours."

The "to yours" grated on his ear terribly, and he hastily plunged into an agricultural discussion.

Presently the rosy-cheeked maid brought in a snowy cloth and the Derby tea-set, and proceeded to lay the table for the afternoon meal.

"If I don't make too bold, sir," remarked Miss Crowther, suddenly breaking off in a description of a brown foal she was bringing up for Jim's especial benefit, "will you take some tea with us? We are homely folks, and always have the meal at five!"

"It is really very kind of you to ask me," he returned, with alacrity. "It will give me much pleasure to stay for a cup of tea!" and unconsciously his eyes wandered to Mary, who had risen, and, like Wether's Charlotte, was cutting bread-and-butter.

It was a pleasant meal, and he enjoyed it, as they all sat round the table, prettily decorated with flowers, eating Pru's home-made cakes and the snow-white bread-and-butter and quince-preserve, and some early strawberries, smothered in thick, rich cream.

Everything seemed fresh and sweet, and he ate with far greater relish than he did at home; and appreciated the homely fare more than he did the grand dinners at the Court, and the nauseating made dishes and French messes concocted by the Parisian chef kept by the Squire.

After it was over they sat some time longer, listening to Conol's stories of India, snake-chymers and Fakirs, nautch girls, and Sepoys, which Mary heard with breathless interest. And then, when at last he rose reluctantly, and declared he must go, Prudence and Mary walked down through the garden with him; and the former warmly pressed him to come again, an invitation of which he was not slow to avail himself.

Two or three times a week the young Squire found his way to Castle Farm on some pretext or another, and sometimes without any pretext at all, and was welcomed by every inmate of the farmstead save one, and that one was Jim.

His eyes, sharpened by love, saw what it was drew this high-bred, polished gentleman so often to seek the society of humble folk, and "all his soul was as the breaking wind" with wrath and grief and fear—fear that he would lose Mary, the one thing he craved for and coveted above all else in the whole wide world!

He felt there was a difference in her, slight, subtle, unseen by the others, yet palpable to him.

She did not take quite the same amount of interest in him and those things that narrowly concerned him, though she was ever sweet and sisterly in her manner. Then she was more dreamy than of yore, and there was a new softness on her that rendered more attractive her brilliant beauty.

It was well for him that he was very busy in the fields and meadows, and superintending the farm-labourers, the erection of new machinery, &c.—for Miss Crowther tolerated idleness in neither master nor man—and Jim had been so long accustomed to her will and to show her obedience that he never thought of rebelling now he was of age, and actually master of everything. Still he went about his work in a heavy, listless, half-hearted sort of way, and hated the sunshine, and the springing grasses, and the budding flowers, and the general glow and brilliance of earth and sky.

How different were those bright, early spring days to Mary! How full of a new happiness—a new delight. Until then she had hardly noticed the smell of the new-mown hay, its sweet, wholesome smell, nor the fragrance of the traveller's joy, and the delicate beauty of the wild roses clustered in the hedges, the perfume of the meadow-sweet, or at least everything struck on her senses with a new sensation of pleasure. The cause of this alteration she was ignorant of, and regarded Conol with eyes of veneration, repeating to herself what Jim tried to console himself with, that there was little in common between her and the young Squire. He was of the quality, an aristocrat, while she was simply a farmer's niece, and as much below him as the labourers working on the farm were beneath her; but still she loved, and if all unconsciously, was having her brief day of happiness, no matter what might come of the morrow!

CHAPTER V.

"My love is like the acorn;
From first faint longing grown,
Its giant shade of beauty,
Across thy path is thrown.
I must not say, 'Love, love me!'
But this shall be my plea:
'Where'er thy bower bloometh,
May I dwell near to thee!'"

THE weeks wore on in a blissful fashion for Mary. She did not look into the future; she contented herself with the present, dreaming away the time happily.

She woke from this dream with a rude start one Sunday morning.

The Crowthers' pew was the second best in the old Norman church at Derryardor, and faced the Squire's, in all its magnificence of carving and crimson curtains.

One hot June morning, according to their invariable custom, the family from Castle Farm arrived in good time and took their usual places, having plenty of time to get cool after their hot walk, for Miss Crowther never allowed the luxury of a carriage on the Sabbath.

Mary watched the sexton's wife settling the books in the Court pew with a little thrill of pleasurable excitement for she knew she would see Conol, and presently, just before the minister was ready to begin, there was a prodigious rustling and bustle, and over the marble flooring, covering the remains of many dead and bygone Britons, came the Court party. From under the shade of her long lashes Mary watched eagerly.

First was Lady Brenton, the Squire's sister, then the Squire himself, and then—Conol, side by side with the most beautiful girl she had ever seen. To Mary's eyes she was like a gorgeous silver pheasant. Her face was fair-skinned, with delicate pink colour on the oval cheeks; her hair a bright chestnut, cut short, and clustering in a bewildering mass of tiny curls and rings on her brow and white neck; her eyes were dark and fringed with long black lashes, and her features regular. Her figure was tall and graceful, and she was dressed to perfection.

Of course she was someone of high degree, and of—course—she was—the young Squire's sweetheart, Mary thought, with a dreadful pang at her heart, as she saw him drop into the seat beside her, and whisper something into her ear that made her smile and show all her pretty teeth; and then he found her places in the prayer-book, and shared the hymn-book with her, and all the time Mary watched them through the shade of those friendly lashes and paid but little heed to the service, which would have greatly scandalized Miss Crowther could she have known of it.

Fortunately she did not, and when the prayers were over she hurried her party off, but not before Mary caught a glimpse of Conol handing the beautiful stranger into the barouche.

The rest of that day Mary passed wandering aimlessly about in the meadows and the poultry-yard, and amid the lush bloom of flowers in the trim old garden. Her head ached, and her heart too, if the truth must be known; she felt listless and depressed, and different from anything she ever felt like before in the short span of her sixteen years.

Jim, watching her, put two and two together, and concluded that Conol Courtney was a scoundrel, and meant to marry the fine lady to whom he had paid so much attention that morning in church, and had been amusing himself and passing the time by hanging about Mary; and the young fellow ground his teeth in impotent rage, and cursed his rival for bringing a shadow to his love's bright eyes.

The next day hymn-making began at the farm and everyone was busy, especially Jim, who had a heap of men to look after and supervise. It had always been Mary's custom to go down to the meadow in the afternoon, and with her head protected by a huge sun-bonnet, play a little at raking the hay; but on this afternoon, after looking listlessly at the busy folk for a short time, she turned away into a field where the knee were grazing—some standing knee-keep in a clear little brook that ran bubbling along, toiling about their heads, and flicking their tails around to get

rid of the flies that tormented them, some nibbling at the lush grasses, others contentedly chewing the cud, and sat down on the emerald turf, with its jewelling of wild flowers, and tossing her hat on the ground, let the gentle breeze blow on her temples, soon becoming lost in deep thought.

She was so preoccupied that she did not see a tall figure coming across the field, and when, with a start, she looked up, it was to find Conol Courtney standing before her, a strange intense look in his dark eyes, that were fastened on her face.

"Mr. Courtney!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet in confusion.

"Don't let me disturb you, Miss Mary," he said eagerly. "You looked so comfortable lying here, and it is delightfully cool!"

"Yes; it is the only cool place I could find," she murmured, sinking back on the turf, while he seated himself on a big stone near her, and thought he had never seen anything fairer than the beautiful fair face, with the rose-flush on the cheeks, and the great, shy, starry eyes that refused so resolutely to meet his own.

"You could not have chosen a more charming spot! It is retired and picturesque!"

"Yes."

"Far from the madding crowd!" he quoted.

"Are the crowds in London and other great cities maddening?" she asked, artlessly.

"Sometimes," he laughed, thinking of the crowds of mamma, with large families of portionless daughters, who had maddened him by their unwelcome attentions.

"And yet most people live in cities!"

"Not always from choice," he put in quickly. "Necessity obliges them to do so often. From choice most people would, I think, prefer the country. Everything is fresher, purer, more natural there, even the girls and their complexion. Country girls have no need for paint and powder like town ones."

"Do town girls paint their faces?" she asked, in horrified surprise; and at last the obstinate lids lifted, and the blue eyes met the brown for an instant.

"Sometimes."

"How horrible!"

"Yes; it isn't nice. Men don't like it. They hate all such shams, and like something true and natural. I fancy it is often that which makes men marry some unsophisticated country maiden who is beneath them in rank."

He spoke dreamily, as though following out his own train of ideas, and forgetful that he had a listener. But Mary flashed scarlet, and then turned very white, while her slim fingers played nervously together.

"The old story of King Cophetua and his beggar-maid played over and over again, you know," he went on, looking at her with a smile.

"King Cophetua made a great mistake," she answered, quietly. "There can be nothing in common between the classes and the masses."

"I am not so sure of that!" he retorted, quickly.

"I am. And I am sure King Cophetua regretted his choice before he died."

"History does not say so."

"History is not always truthful."

"No. Still, if she were pretty, and gentle in her ways, and temper, and true to him, what more could any man want?"

"His equal as a mate," she answered, almost curtly.

"I see you are conservative," he remarked, with another smile, "and don't share my liberal views."

"No."

There was silence between them for a while, and then he broke it by asking,—

"You have commenced haymaking, have you not?"

"Yes, Mr. Courtney."

"Well, my cousin Marcia has a strange whim. She wants to come and have a day amongst the haymakers. Do you think Miss Crowther would

mind if we were to come to-morrow afternoon!"

"I am sure she will be very glad to see you and anyone you wish to bring!"

"Thanks! Did you notice Miss Grantham in church yesterday?"

He looked at her intently as he spoke, and saw the pretty bloom in her face flicker and fade.

"Yes; I saw her," she answered, after a perceptible pause. "She is most lovely! I have never seen anything so beautiful as her face!"

"Haven't you?" he replied, with a queer quizzical look.

"No. And her eyes! Are they not perfect?"

"I don't happen to think them so!" he returned, lightly. "I am not an admirer of brown eyes."

"No!" and the girl looked at him wondering, for his own orbs were brown and soft-looking as velvet.

"I suppose you will be in the meadow to-morrow?"

"Yes; I shall be there," she answered, a trifle listlessly, and he bent forward quickly, looking at her, and was going to say something when old Peter, the herdsman, came in view, trudging sturdily along to fetch the knee home.

"Good-bye! I must go," she murmured, hurriedly.

"Good-bye until to-morrow!" he responded.

The next day, when all were busy in the home meadow, the barouche from the Court drove up to the nearest post, and two ladies and a gentleman got out, and came across to where the crowd of country folk were raking the sweet-smelling grasses.

"I'm glad to see you, sir, and you, my lady!" exclaimed Prudence, who, with Jim and Mary, were all in the meadow waiting for the expected guests.

"Thanks!" drawled Lady Brenton. "My niece, Miss Grantham."

"Pleased to see you!" smiled Pru again.

"Thanks!" cried the beautiful young woman, vivaciously. "I expect some fun. I have come to work! May I, Miss Crowther?"

"Certainly, if you wish to; but the rakes are almost too heavy."

"Conol, you shall help me," turning with a brilliant, alluring smile to the young Squire, who was talking to Jim.

"Of course I will, if you wish it, Marcia; but I know nothing about it. Better let me introduce Crowther to you; he knows all about it." And she, giving an assent, the young farmer was introduced, and showed her how to hold the rake, and helped her to guide it through the mown heaps, while Conol talked to Mary, and Lady Brenton sank indolently into an easy-chair brought out for her, and fanned herself with a large red fan while she talked languidly to patient Pru.

"They get on very well," smiled the young Squire, looking in the direction of his cousin, who was laughing and chattering away to Jim, who was bashfully responding to her lively sallies.

"Yes. Miss Grantham is so bright, she would make anyone love her."

"Well, she tries pretty hard!" agreed the young man, with a laugh.

"Does she? I should not have thought she would have to try at all. She is so beautiful!"

"And you think beauty attracts?"

"Oh, yes, of course!"

"And do you think it retains the regard it wins, if unsupported by other good qualities?"

"No," she answered, hesitatingly. "I do not."

"Then you can understand, perhaps, why Marcia has to try to keep pace with other girls who are not quite so brilliantly good looking."

"Do you mean to say your cousin has no good qualities?" asked Mary slyly.

"Certainly not; but she is a flirt, an unmitigated one. Her thirst for admiration is extraordinary—unquenchable, in fact. All is fish that comes to her net, and if Jim Jones is absent, she will be just as amiable and agreeable

to Jack Smith, and favour him with her lively chatter. Now men don't like that kind of thing. They prefer to think, to feel, that they are king alone of one woman's heart. They like more modesty, more softness, more steadfastness, than my beautiful cousin possesses; in fact, someone more like yourself, Miss Stewart!"

His eyes sought hers passionately as he spoke, and the tide of crimson rushed over her face, even to the roots of her golden hair, and yet through all her embarrassment ran a thrill of rare delight at his words and look. But she turned away towards a rustic table on which was a great pitcher full of milk, and some quaint wooden cups, and filling them offered one to Lady Brenton, who was complaining of the heat, and another to Marcia, who was just a little flushed by her unwonted exertions, and looked more lovely in consequence.

"May I not have some also?" asked Conol, who had followed her.

"Of course, if you wish it," she replied, shyly, with down-drooped lids.

"I wish it very much from your hands," he returned, in low tones, and he managed to press her slender fingers tenderly as he took the cup.

"And now come and show me how to rake!"

And obediently she got a rake, and then was obliged to place his scurried, muscular hands properly on it, and couldn't forbear a laugh when he leant back awkwardly, and failed to drag the hay towards him.

"Ah, Conol!" called his aunt, derisively. "you'll never make a good country squire! Your hands are better at handling a sword than a rake. Miss Stewart is laughing at you!"

"I don't in the least mind her laughing at me!" he answered, diligently working away, while the farm-folk looked in amazement at the "quality" labouring for mere amusement as they did for daily bread.

"That niece of yours is very handsome!" observed the great lady in languid tones to Pru. "Quite an elegant and distinguished air about her!"

"Do you think so, my lady?" exclaimed the good creature in delight.

"Yes. She reminds me of someone I knew in India!"

"Her mother was one of the beautiful sort; and that reminds me Mary was born in India!"

"Ah! Really! Well, of course, she could not be my friend's daughter!"

"I am not so sure of that," began Pru, and Heaven only knows what revelations she might have made; but at that moment Miss Grantham ran up and disported a great rent in her delicate gown that she and Jim had done between them with the rake, and declared she must return to The Court; so her aunt, nothing loth, rose, and as the westerling sun was tingling all the sky with a blood-red glow, they mounted into their carriage and drove off, declaring themselves well-pleased with their afternoon's amusement.

CHAPTER VI.

"Then snatch at the joy—for the moment is fleeting;
To-day we are one in our joy and our pain,
But alas! for to-morrow a whirlwind of sorrow
May part us, or tear us asunder again."

SOME days later, Mary went out to sketch in the woods behind Derryard, and after having arranged her paraphernalia sat down, pencil in hand, and began to work.

After a few moments a rustling of the grass made her turn, and she saw Conol coming towards her.

Her first impulse was to get up and hurry away, as she had not seen him since the hay-making, and felt shy, afraid; but she knew he had seen her, so she bent over the drawing, and pretended not to see him.

"Don't you mean to give me a greeting, Miss Mary?" he asked, casting himself down on the grass by her side, "or are you too much absorbed in your work to notice me?"

"No," and she stretched out a little white hand, which he took and held till she gently withdrew it, blushing deeply.

"What an age it is since I have seen you!" he went on, his eyes devouring the fair, downcast beauty of her face.

"It was only last week you were haymaking with us," she observed in low tones.

"Last week! nine days ago! and since then I have never once been blessed with a single glimpse of you!"

"Where did you hide all the times I came to the farm?"

"I—I—did not—hide!" she faltered, blushing still deeper. "I was busy!"

"That is to say, you wanted to avoid me, and did so!"

"Oh, Mr. Courtney!"

"It is no use saying 'oh, Mr. Courtney' to reproachfully, because you know it is the truth; and, moreover, I would far rather you called me Conol!"

"Call you that! Why!" she asked, apparently overwhelmed with astonishment.

"Because, Mary," catching both her hands in his, "I love you, and I want to hear the woman I love call me Conol. Will you?"

"Let me go, please! I must not listen to you."

"You must and shall!" he answered firmly, holding her tightly in his powerful clasp.

"I dare not."

"Why?"

"Because there can be no question of love between you and me. You are of an aristocratic family, and I am only a farmer's niece," she said, gently, and yet with decision.

"And what of that! If a man wishes to choose his wife from a family not quite as old or proud as his own, why should he not?" he asked, passionately.

"Because such matches never turn out happily, and men grow ashamed of their low-born wives."

"As though I should ever be ashamed of you!" he murmured, fondly.

"You would after a time," she returned, with strong conviction.

"You are very wise, little one!" bending down till his moustache swept her brow.

"I have heard aunt say that many times."

"And now hear me say that I should never be ashamed of you, never regret our marriage; that I should love you, dearly, truly, to the last day of my life."

The girl trembled with joy, but listened in silence.

"Have I been mistaken, presumptuous?" he went on, after a pause. "Do you care for someone else? I fancied, sometimes, that you did not quite hate me."

"Hate you!" she exclaimed, lifting a pair of starry eyes to his fall of a tender love-light.

"Oh, no! no! Do not think that."

"Then—may I think the other? Do you love me?"

For a minute they looked at each other, a glance from soul to soul; and then, as her lips seemed to form a silent yes, he caught her to him and kissed the red mouth passionately.

"My dearest!" he murmured, "your love makes me so happy. Tell me you are mine!"

"Yes, Mr. Courtney, I am yours entirely!"

"Mr. Courtney," he repeated, with reproach in his tone. "Won't you give me a promise to call me Conol always, from this day forth?"

"If you wish it," she assented, shyly.

"Conol!"

"Conol," she repeated.

"That is right. And you really do love me!" he went on, his arm lightly clasping her waist, unrebuked.

"With all my heart. I could not love you better than I do."

"I am glad to hear it," he returned, looking at her contentedly, and noting the beautiful sweep of long lashes on the fairness of her cheeks, "because it gives me a hope that you will consent soon to be my wife. Mine, so that no one can take you from me; mine, while life lasts, beyond the power of anyone to take you from me."

"I must not press you now, he went on, as she remained silent, "on that point, as your

ideas do not yet coincide with mine; but, Mary, you will accept this as a pledge," slipping on an old-fashioned diamond ring on her finger, "as a pledge of our betrothal; and in the next few weeks try and accustom yourself to the thought of being my wife, and the happiness you will bring to my life."

"If I thought it would bring you happiness—happiness only," she murmured hesitatingly, "and not misery, and regret, and—"

"It could never bring me that," he said, tenderly. "My affection is too strong to admit of that."

And giving a glance around, and seeing the only living things in sight were some birds who, though they were flying towards the Court, would tell no tales, he took the girl he loved in his arms, and kissed the quivering red lips, and the eyes that were bright with tears.

The two met frequently after that in the green allée of Derryardor woods, unknown to a single soul, for though he had said nothing to her, she tacitly understood that all was to be kept a secret until she accepted him for her affianced husband, and so she slung his ring on a blue ribbon, and wore it round her neck resting on her heart, and said never a word even to Pru.

But her life seemed quite changed, like a sweet-rhymed poem, and her beauty grew day by day more perfect and glowing; and Jim looking on with gloomy, despairing eyes, guessed the cause, and cursed the day that brought Conol Courtney back from India.

With unquestioning confidence, with unbounded trust, she had given her love to this man whom she thought her superior by birth, and still she hesitated to become his wife lest by so doing she might mar his fair and prosperous future, and draw down on his head his haughty father's wrath. But at last she gave way to his pleadings, and promised to become his wife at no distant date provided his father gave his consent.

It was with a jubilant heart that Conol entered the Squire's study the next morning, feeling almost certain of success. He was the only child, had never been refused anything from the earliest age. He had, however, reckoned without his host, for the Squire's wrath was terrible when his son unfolded his matrimonial plan.

"What! Give my consent to your marrying a farmer's niece! Never!" he exclaimed, furiously.

"She is every inch a lady, and a sweet one too," declared the young man.

"That may be; but her pedigree won't bear inspection. Your wife, Conol, must be like Cæsar's, above suspicion in every respect."

"No woman could be purer or more modest than Mary."

"That may be. I remember seeing her as a child some years ago, and she was remarkably pretty then; but it is her position and relatives I object to. Why, boy, the Crowthers' grandfather worked on your grandfather's estate, a common labourer, at a dozen shillings a week!"

"All the more credit for his descendants that they have risen by their own industry and perseverance to the present respectable position they hold," answered Conol, boldly.

"Quite right," allowed the old gentleman, "but I could never receive one of them as my daughter."

"Are you quite determined on that point, sir?"

"Quite!" inflexibly.

"My happiness or misery is nothing to you, then?"

"On the contrary, it is everything. You are blinded by love, and cannot look clearly into the future, and see what this folly would lead to. I know before a year passed over your head that you would regret having a low-born wife whom your poor friends would snub insolently while they took your hospitality, and your rich ones refuse to receive or visit altogether."

"Well, my friends will have an opportunity of acting in that way; for, if you refuse your consent, sir, I shall marry without it!" and,

turning, he left the room, and his proud father in a state of mind better imagined than described.

"Good Heavens! He will ruin himself! Emma must help me," and ringing the bell he requested his valet to ask Lady Brenton to come to him at once.

In a few minutes her ladyship arrived, languid as usual; but her languor quickly disappeared when she heard the news; and she agreed with her brother that the only chance of stopping this marriage was to appeal to the girl herself. Therefore, ordering the carriage, she set off at once for Castle Farm.

Mary was in the old, lavender-scented parlour when she arrived, and rose to meet her with considerable trepidation and wonder. However, she was not left long in doubt as to the reason of her visit. Women are proverbially cruel to one another, and love to give a stab when they can, more especially when the stabbed is young and lovely, and the stabber old and ugly.

Her ladyship was no exception to this rule, and in a few curt, cold words she showed the unhappy girl what an injury she would do Conol by marrying him, and what a wide unbridgable gulf yawned between her and the man she adored.

"Then I can trust to your good sense in this matter, Miss Stewart?" she said last, as she rose to go.

"You can trust to my love for your nephew, madam!" she answered, with a pride and hauteur that equalled the great lady's own. "I would not for the world injure one so dear to me!"

But when the carriage drove away she threw out her arms with a gesture of despair, and burying her face in the sofa-cushion, gave way to agony of tearless grief.

"My dearest, what is the matter?" asked a voice, some hour or so later, and she felt herself encircled by a pair of strong arms that drew her into their safe haven, and there tears came to her relief. "My darling! what is it?" he implored, pressing his cheek to hers. "What has happened to you?"

"The greatest—trial—that—could," she sobbed, brokenly. "I must never see you again, Conol!"

"Never see me again! Mary, my almost wife, are you out of your senses?" he cried.

"No; but Lady Brenton—has been—here—and she has shown me—my duty—plainly. I—should—ruin—your future—if I married you!"

"You will ruin it if you don't," he exclaimed, passionately. "Confound that meddling old fool. What right had she to come here and interfere in my affairs!"

"The right given by your father," she said, more calmly. "He has refused to consent to our marriage."

"And what if he has! We shall not be the only pair of people married without parents' consent and approval."

And then the young man tried every argument to induce her to consent to a marriage with him; but though nearly heart-broken at the thought of having to part with him she held firmly to her honourable resolution, and at last he left her in despair and anger, declaring she could not love him.

This was the cruellest cut of all, and as the hot August days passed on, and the corn ripened and fell 'neath the reaper's sickle, and wild flowers to droop and fade, so Mary began to fade also, and the alteration in her looks awaking Pru's anxiety, she, by dint of persevering prayers and entreaties, arrived at last at the truth.

"Don't worry and fret, dearie!" said Pru. "You're every bit as good as the young Squire. I'll make it all right in a short time."

And that night, Conol, who had been unable to tear himself away from the vicinity of Castle Farm to the girl he loved, received an ill-written, not over-well-spelt letter, that, despite its shortcomings, seemed very welcome to him; and next day Pru actually set out on a journey to London, a thing she had not done for nearly twenty years, and was away two days.

When she came back she marched straight into Mary's room, and put a bulky letter into her hand.

"Read that, dearie. It will tell you who you really are, and show you that the common folk are neither kith nor kin to ye!"

In extreme agitation Mary opened the letter. It was from her uncle, Roderick Macgregor, and gave her the real, full and true account of her parentage, and the information that her Aunt Marjorie was dead.

"Then I am his equal!" she exclaimed, joyfully.

"Yes, dearie, an' you had better go 'and tell him so. He's in the parlour."

And the good creature passed outside the door, and then sat down and had a good cry.

We will draw a veil over the meeting of the lovers; but a month later there was a brilliant wedding at the old Norman church at Derryardor, and the Squire gave away the bride, and Lady Brenton presented the wedding-dress to Mary, for she had discovered she was her young friend Kathleen O'Hagan's child, and felt she couldn't do too much for her; and Miss Grantham and five other young ladies of "high degree" were bridesmaids, and Patience and Pru, in their Sunday best, were honoured guests, and only poor Jim was absent.

He lay face downwards in the dewy aftermath of the home-meadow, wrestling with his anguish and misery, and wondering what he should do with all the rest of his life that stretched before him—a blank!

"And I am so young," he muttered, miserably. "Not yet twenty-two! and she will forget me."

"Of what avail, then, sighs or tears
For bygone hours that leave a sting?
Will she remember anything.
Of that which haunts him through the years,
Or hear the echo of his sighs,
Or bear the burden that he bears?"

[THE END.]

THE DOCTOR'S FAMILY.

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"FIVE of 'em," said Dr. Blake with complacent eyes. "All fine, well-grown girls, as straight as an arrow, and understanding themselves well. Except Kate. And she's an odd one, not a bit like the rest. I don't understand it. Never did. If it was the old days of evil fairies I should most think she'd been changed in her cradle, ha, ha, ha!"

The four Misses Blake laughed aloud, as in duty bound they laughed at all their father's jokes.

They were exactly like the doctor, always excepting a hundred extra pounds or so of avoirdupois, a bristly beard, and masculine habiliments.

Their laugh was the very echo of his, their complexion was similar, they even walked and carried their heads like him.

But Kate coloured like a rose, and shrank into her corner at the jeering laughter.

"There isn't one of 'em but could support herself just as well as any man going. If it were necessary," went on the doctor. "Except Kate. She never had any faculty that I could find out. Eh, what's the matter? Kate, where are you going?"

"Ls, ps, let her go," said Mrs. Blake. "I don't see why you're always sneering at poor Kate. She don't take any comfort of her life."

"Sneering!" repeated the doctor, "I'm only speaking truth."

Miss Ethel Blake had a studio in the north room and painted. The doctor, in his paternal partiality, compared her pictures to those of Turner.

"Just look at those reds and purples," said he. "Don't it remind you of the 'Slave Ship'! There's no calculating what that girl will accomplish before she's thirty."

Miss Minnie taught in a school, and dabbled in Darwin and Herbert Spencer.

"If Minnie ever writes a book," said the doctor, "I'd like a chance to read it. A girl with that shaped head is bound to have intellect."

Ada stenographed when she could get any member of the family to read aloud with sufficient slowness. Any rapidity of speech threw her off her equilibrium, but as the doctor said, time would improve that.

"I'm told that some of the court stenographers in London get a thousand pounds a year," observed he. "Why shouldn't Ada?" And Clara Blake was taking lessons in music. "She has a stunner of a voice," said her father, "and in London they pay any price for good singers. I shall get her a sister when I go to town next. But as for Kate, bless me, I don't know how that child does fill up her time."

Kate, a slender, dark-faced little girl, heard all these comments in silence. Mr. White, the rector, could perhaps have told of the kindly visits she made to sick families, the sewing she did for poor, overworked mothers.

The weak-eyed old druggist could have borne witness to the prescriptions she copied for him, so that no frightful mistake should cloud his later years. As for Mrs. Blake she boldly asserted that she couldn't keep house without Kate.

"The other girls never have any time to help me," she said. "But Kate is always ready."

"Jack at all trades and good at none," said the doctor. "Now, see here, wife, in my opinion every woman ought to have a trade to support herself. She ought to excel in something. Now, what can Kate do?"

"Don't worry, pa," said Mrs. Blake. "I'll risk Kate!"

But one day a bomb of misfortune fell into the camp of the Blakes. A never-do-well brother of the doctor, somewhere out in Australia, for whom he had endorsed to a considerable amount, disappeared suddenly, and from a comfortable competence the Blakes were plunged into poverty.

"This place must go," said the doctor, who had grown old and haggard within the past twenty-four hours. "We'll have to move to that little house on the London Road. The girls must go to work. The—"

Then his voice became strangely muffled—the features of his face drew to one side—he sunk helplessly on the floor.

"Paralyzed on the right side," said the doctor, when he viewed the case. "Oh, yes, he'll rally. He may live for years. But his professional career is over. What is that he's saying! A good thing that the girls can support themselves! Well, so it is, eh? I wouldn't try to talk if I were you, doctor. Except Kate. Yes, I understand. But don't fret—take things easy. It'll all be right."

The four elder girls were affectionate daughters, and at once began to consider their futures and that of their father.

Miss Ethel boxed up a number of paintings and sent them to different art galleries in prominent cities. Minnie applied for the principalship of a high-grade school near by, and sent a fat bundle of M.S., on the sly, to a publisher in town.

Ada put an advertisement in a paper: "Wanted—a situation as stenographer; willing to go as low as £3 a week to obtain experience."

And Clara decided to take music pupils, and entered an application as organist to the new church under Chilton Hills.

"They pay a hundred a year," said she. "I may as well have it as any one else."

While Katie busied herself in waiting on her father, and diligently picked up all the dropped stitches of work which Mrs. Blake could no longer attend to.

The doctor took a great fancy to his youngest daughter in the capacity of nurse.

"I dare say the others mean well," said he, in that muffled, tongue-tied speech which nobody but Kate could understand. "But they step so heavy, and they speak so loud, and I can't make 'em comprehend what I want! Kate is all the

nurse I need. Let them earn the family bread; that's what they're fitted for."

As time went on, however, the family bread did not seem to get itself earned. Miss Ethel's pictures came back with a considerable amount of carriage to pay; but no orders followed. Minnie lost not only the high-salaried position at which she had aimed, but the humbler one which she disdained. Nobody took the least notice of Ada's advertisement; and Clara in her first attempt to play the organ of the new church broke down ignominiously.

"You should have known better than to attempt, with the school of training you have had," said the retiring organist, a little bald-headed enthusiast, with eyes like coals of steel-grey fire. "Send Kate to me."

"Kate can't play," faltered Clara through her tears.

"I don't know that," said the organist. "Kate at least would know the difference between one of Bach's anthems and a waltz by Chopin. Send her to me, I say!"

So that all the four high-complexioned Misses Blake sat helplessly bawling themselves around the family hearthstone, while Clara prepared inexpensive dainties for them, mended their gloves, and comforted them to the best of her ability. The poor doctor listened uneasily to the hum of their voices from the next room.

"What are they doing there?" he asked, in his indistinct fashion. "Why don't they earn their own living, eh?"

"We can't, pa!" cried the four girls in chorus. "There's so much competition. We don't have any licence to back us."

"The London editors have a clique of their own personal friends, and no one else can get into it," said Minnie.

"There is no demand for type-writers and stenographers," faltered Ada.

"Art is going down," declared Ethel, while Clara expressed herself only by tears and sobs.

"I suppose," said the doctor, "we must live. They might put me into a hospital; but there's my poor wife! And Kate—"

"Papa, it will all be right," soothed Kate. "You must have faith as a grain of mustard seed. Only wait!"

It was on a blossomy, rain-sprinkled April Sunday when Doctor Blake was able to hobble for the first time into the new church, leaning on a cane on one side, and on the other supported by Clara.

"You are so clumsy!" said he, fretfully. "You jerk me so! Where's Kate? Why didn't she come?"

"Kate isn't as tall as I am, pa," whined poor Clara, "nor so strong!"

"But she's got more sense in her than all the rest of you put together!" retorted the invalid.

The sound of the familiar hymns, the softened light of the stained-glass windows, the voice of the clergyman, however, all tended to soothe the poor old man's perturbed spirit when he was seated.

"My favourite hymns," he said to himself. "Good Heavens—it seems almost as if I were a boy again! That new organ has a sweet tone!"

One by one the slow tears rolled down his cheek; nor were they altogether tears of sorrow, rather sad, tender dew sacred to the past.

"I haven't thought as much of these things as I ought," pondered he, as the majestic strains of the "Old Hundred" rolled down the aisles. "Perhaps Heaven knew better than I did when it laid its heavy hand on me. Who knows?"

"Well, doctor," said the puffy, spectacled little churchwarden when they all went out, "what do you think of our new organist?"

"He understands his business, sir, that's certain," said Doctor Blake.

His speech was plainer now—one could comprehend his meaning.

"But it's a woman," said the churchwarden.

"Then, sir, she's a genius."

"We've engaged her at £120 a year," said the warden. "Every one is pleased."

"I shall come here every Sunday and hear her play," said the old man. "I'm sorry my girl couldn't have suited you, but—"

"Why, man, it is your girl," said the cheery little churchwarden. "Your Kate. Mr. White told us she could play, but we didn't expect music like this. You're right, she is a genius."

Doctor Blake hobbled home in silence, but when Kate came to him after dinner he held out his well-hand with something of a pleading air.

"Kate," said he, "my child, why didn't you tell me of this?"

"Because," whispered Kate, "so much depended on it. Because I was so afraid I should fail. And when I saw you sitting there—oh, papa, the keys all turned black before my sight for a minute."

"Daughter, all the music went straight to my heart," said Doctor Blake. "You've done me good. I thank Heaven that you are my child!"

And then Kate explained to him how she had learned secretly and with many misgivings to play on the organ, how she had loved it, and, nevertheless, how amazed she was when Mr. White asked her, after Clara's failure, to attempt the manipulation of the keys and stops.

"But that isn't all, papa," said Kate, hanging her pretty, dark head.

"En!" said Doctor Blake. "What else?"

"Mr. White has asked me to be his wife."

"What did you tell him, Kate?"

"I said I couldn't leave you."

"Well?"

"And he said I needn't. He said there was plenty of room in the new rectory for you and mother both, and he said that a good daughter always made a good wife. And, oh, papa, I am so happy!"

Doctor Blake sat thinking long after Kate had gone to take the afternoon service at the church.

"How strangely things turn out," pondered he. "All the four girls upon whom I depended have proved to be broken reeds, and little Kate whom I've actually despised all my life is the one to lean on. Well, well, I'm rather old to learn a lesson, and yet I have learned it to-day."

So Kate Blake married Mr. White, and took her parents home to the rectory with her, and the four handsome, robust young women who had calculated on opening the world like an oyster, with the blade of their various careers, are still looking around for some way of supporting themselves.

"Poor things!" said the rector, "they have yet to learn that to be successful bread-winners they must absolutely excel in some one direction. And they've no more idea of it than four children."

"But they're very talented," said wistful Kate.

"It isn't talent that tells in the world's arena," said Mr. White. "It's good common sense and hard work."

CLIFFE COURT.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. THOMAS DAINTREE, late head of the firm of Daintree, Richardson, and Daintree, lived in a very nice house in Russell Square—a house that was heavy, and square, and substantial looking, like Mr. Daintree himself; and on the particular afternoon of which I write the lawyer was seated in a capacious dining-room, eating filberts and drinking '68 port by way of dessert—for he invariably dined in the middle of the day.

He did not look particularly delighted when a housemaid entered, and interrupted this pleasing occupation.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, if you please, sir."

"But I don't please! You know I never please to see people directly after my dinner."

"I told the gentleman so, but he said I was to give you this," tendering a card, "and perhaps you would make an exception in his favour."

"Some begging impostor, I daresay," muttered the lawyer, putting on his spectacles.

Directly he glanced at the card his manner changed. "Show the gentleman in at once, Watson. Mr. Hubert Cliffe! I wonder what he wants with me!"

Hubert was ushered in, shaken hands with by Mr. Daintree, and entreated to taste the '58 port, which, however, he declined. He looked anxious and worried—as he felt, and without any further preliminary, stated the business on which he had come.

"Of course you are aware of what has transpired at Cliffe since my uncle's death?" he said.

"You mean Lady De Roubalx taking possession of the estates?" responded the lawyer, putting the matter in as delicate phraseology as possible. "Yes, I am aware of it, and for your sake I was very sorry to hear of it."

"But not surprised!"

Mr. Daintree carefully cracked a nut before replying.

"Well, we lawyers have so many strange circumstances brought under our notice that we get out of the way of being much surprised at anything."

"Which is equivalent to saying that you were prepared for what has actually taken place," said Hubert. "I came to you, Mr. Daintree, in the hope of getting information that might aid me in searching for proofs of my parents' marriage, and also because I thought your advice, as the confidential solicitor to the Cliffe family, would be valuable."

"You are very kind to say so. As you are aware, I have retired from actual practice, but any assistance in my power I shall render you with very great pleasure. First of all, let me persuade you to have a glass of this port. I assure you it is equal to the best advice in the world."

Hubert shook his head, smiling faintly.

"No, thank you; at any rate, not at present. I believe you were in my grandfather's confidence to a great extent," he added, drawing his chair up nearer, "and if so you can tell me of the relations subsisting between him and my father, and this may be of some service to me in pursuing my inquiries. You see, I am not inclined to give up the heritage I was taught to look upon as my own without a struggle."

"Quite right, too, and I hope with all my heart you may succeed," exclaimed the old man, sincerely. "All I know I will tell you. Your father was, in his early youth, rather wild and extravagant, and Lord Cliffe several times paid his debts. He was fond of betting, and gambled a good deal, but we were all inclined to look upon his failings with a lenient eye, for he was generous and kind-hearted to a degree; and his father often said to me that when he had sowed his wild oats he would settle down into as steady and respectable a man as Everard himself—the last Lord Cliffe. Alec was away from home some time, and when he went back he said his father had a terrible quarrel, the particulars of which no one save myself ever knew. It seems that Alec was greatly in debt, and begged for money, which his father promised to give him on condition that he married a certain lady in the county, who was very wealthy, and who was supposed to be in love with him. This Alec absolutely refused to do, and when pressed for a reason, said that he was already engaged to a young girl whom he happened to see when he was attending some races at W—. Lord Cliffe inquired who she was, and it then transpired that she served in a music shop in the town, and, though of respectable enough parents, yet could only claim to belong to middle-class tradespeople."

Mr. Daintree paused, and Hubert thought here were some few points of resemblance between his father's case and his own. Having taken a long sip at his wine, the lawyer continued:—

"The Viscount—I am speaking of the last but one—was an extremely proud man, aristocratic to his fingers' ends, and the idea of an alliance between his son and a woman of plebeian extraction was terrible to him. He entreated, threatened, commanded; all to no avail, for Alec absolutely refused to give up his

fancie; so, as a last resource, Lord Cliffe went to the girl herself; explained to her how matters stood with his son, and said that if she would break off her engagement he would pay Alec's debts, but if not, he would let his creditors do what they chose with him—which meant imprisonment. It seems that the young woman was deeply and disinterestedly in love with Alec; and at last, for his sake, she consented to send back his ring, and promised not to see him again; so she wrote and told him her decision, and then went to some relatives, and concealed from him her address. The end of the matter was, Alec went out to Australia with the idea of setting up sheep-farming and retrieving his fallen fortunes, and nothing was heard of him for some years—nothing, in fact, till after his father had died, and his brother Everard had gone out to see him, arriving just before his death."

"Do you know the name of the young woman in question?" asked Hubert, eagerly.

The lawyer shook his head.

"I do not. That particular was not mentioned when Lord Cliffe told me the story."

"Is there any way of discovering it?"

"I fear not after this lapse of time, especially considering that the facts were kept as secret as possible."

There was a pause, broken by Hubert.

"And after my Uncle Everard returned from Australia what happened?"

"Well, he came straight from Liverpool to London, and called on me in my offices in Lincoln's Inn, bringing you with him, and I recollect when I saw you I said, 'This is a Cliffe, my lord; I can tell by his likeness to the family!' 'You are right, Daintree,' he answered, 'this is Hubert Cliffe, my brother Alec's son, and my future heir. Naturally I asked him for further particulars, but his replies were curt in the extreme, and Viscount Cliffe was a man you could not cross-examine. When I suggested something about certificates of marriage and birth he cut me short, saying that was his affair, and telling me to answer no questions that might be asked me concerning the matter, so of course I had no alternative but silence. One thing, he said, that impressed me—it was, 'Remember, if people ask you who this boy is you will answer, "He is the Honourable Alec Cliffe's lawful son, and the future Lord Cliffe."'"

"Did he say that—really say it?" exclaimed Hubert, eagerly.

"He said it," returned the lawyer, with a certain significant emphasis not lost on his hearer.

"But you did not believe it!" the young man added, disappointedly.

"I will hardly go so far as that. To tell you the truth, Mr. Hubert, I did not know what to believe then, any more than I do now. It seemed to me most improbable that Lord Cliffe should adopt you as his heir if he were not assured, in his own mind, that you could lawfully claim the name of Cliffe, and yet, on the other hand, he seemingly possessed no documents to substantiate that claim. I was puzzled then; I have been puzzled ever since, and I often wondered if the mystery would ever be fathomed. Lord Cliffe was a man who laid down a law for himself, and expected other people to abide by it; moreover, he would allow no one to question whether it was right or wrong."

"Then, as a matter of fact, you cannot tell me what your own ideas are in the matter?"

"Honestly, and candidly, I cannot. Sometimes I believe one thing, sometimes another; but I have no fixed conviction, except that, anyhow, you have been shamefully treated. It's bad enough for a man who has been brought up to work to find himself thrown on the world to get his own living, but it's a hundredfold harder for one who, like yourself, has been accustomed to believe himself heir to vast estates. Whatever the truth may be concerning your birth, you have my sincere sympathy at the present moment."

Hubert thanked him, and shortly afterwards took leave, and went out into the square, pondering over what he had heard.

On the whole, he did not consider he had had a lost journey, for he had succeeded in tracing

out the causes of his father's expatriation, and that was something. So far as he could judge, Alec Cliffe's love for the girl who was so much beneath him in position had been a deep and honourable one. Could it be possible that girl had eventually gone out to Australia after him, in spite of her promise to his father?

If Hubert had but known her name it would have been a help, for he might have traced her out, and discovered what had been her career subsequent to the breaking off of her engagement; but in this particular the lawyer had not been able to assist him; and even if he went down to W— it was most unlikely that he would succeed in finding out who she was—so unlikely, that to attempt it looked like a wild-goose chase.

Lost in thought he wandered on, and found himself in Tottenham Court-road, along which he walked, having nothing particular to do, until he got to Camden Town. He had rather counted on his interview with Mr. Daintree helping him to a decision as to his next step; but this he had hardly done, for it left the mystery of his uncle's conduct in exactly the same condition as before, and the only way to clear it up seemed to be the one he had already suggested to Arline—namely, his going out to Australia, and searching for records of his father in the place where he had died—and of this place he had the name, for it was given him by Lord Cliffe himself, some years ago, when they had been talking of having a tablet erected to Alec's memory in Cliffe Church.

"Yes," exclaimed the young man aloud in his excitement, "I will go out there, and search, and if I am unsuccessful I will give up the quest altogether, and set about earning a living. Surely I can win enough to keep Arline and myself!"

He was just about crossing the street when he saw before him a lady, dressed in black, who was standing in the middle of the road, looking helplessly round as if in search of someone. At the same moment a handsome cab dashed up, and must inevitably have knocked her down had not our hero, seeing her danger, rushed forward, just in time to push her back, but not in time to save himself. The driver of the cab pulled up sharply, but it was too late, for the shaft had struck Hubert in the chest, and as he fell forward, the horse, in rearing, hit him on the temple.

Instantly a crowd collected, as crowds will, and a middle-aged woman, who had been on the pavement, caught the lady Hubert had rescued by the arm, and then pressed forward with the others.

"What is it, Justina—oh! what is it?" exclaimed the young lady, in very sweet and silvery tones, that were slightly tinged with a foreign accent.

"Who was it took hold of me and pushed aside so roughly?"

"The gentleman who saved your life, Signorina," was the reply; "don't you know you had just got in front of a vehicle, and must have been killed, if he had not so bravely come to your assistance? And now he is lying there just as you would have been if he hadn't risked his life for yours."

The girl—she was hardly more—clasped her hands together in an excess of grief.

"Go to him, Justina—do what you can—see that medical aid is sent for!" she cried, wildly. "Oh! my poor blind eyes—what terrible consequences have you led me into!"

For those dark eyes, so full and lustrous that they were the first thing in her face to attract attention, had been for years closed the light of Heaven. She was blind.

"You should not have gone from my side; you know what always happens," commenced the elder woman, but her mistress imperiously interrupted her.

"Do not scold me now—you can do that afterwards. See to the poor man."

Amongst the crowd was a dark, clean-shaven young man, with reliable-looking grey eyes, who had come forward announcing himself as a surgeon, and he was kneeling down, examining the unconscious Hubert, when Justina led her companion to the spot.

"Is he hurt very much?" she inquired.

"I am afraid so—seriously."

"Oh, I hope not—I hope not—I shall look upon myself as his murderer!" exclaimed the innocent cause of the accident; and her voice made the surgeon look at her with sudden interest, that was certainly not lessened as he saw her face—a beautiful southern-looking face, with a curiously pathetic expression, whose meaning he did not then understand.

"Does anyone here know who this gentleman is?" inquired a policeman, who had arrived on the scene; and as no one was in a position to answer the question, he proceeded to look in the pockets of the injured man for the purpose of discovering his identity. As it happened, Hubert had neither his card-case, letters, or memoranda about him—not a line, in fact, to indicate who he was, and this being so, the policeman suggested the propriety of his being taken to a hospital.

The blind woman heard the suggestion, and negatived it at once.

"Let him be brought to my house. I am to blame for his present condition, and surely I may be allowed to do what I can to remedy it," she said. "My home is quite close at hand—closer than any hospital."

"Are you aware what you propose to undertake, madam?" said the surgeon (whose name was Carew). "This gentleman's recovery—supposing he does recover—will be a long and tedious affair, and he will require the utmost care and attention."

"I am quite willing to promise that he shall have it," she responded, quickly. "No efforts on my part shall be spared in tending him, and I can answer for my servant as well."

"Where is your house?"

"In Maitland Park Crescent—quite close at hand."

"In that case I think the gentleman had better be removed at once," said the surgeon; and after a little conversation with the policeman the latter called a cab, and Hubert was gently placed within it, Mr. Carew accompanying, and followed by the blind lady and her attendant in a second cab.

Who shall say that anything in this world happens by chance, or that the smallest incident does not play a part in that mysterious chain of circumstances that enfolds us all?

The simple fact of Hubert having, in his pre-occupied state of mind, turned to the right instead of to the left when he was leaving Russell-square, was destined to lead to events which, but for that trivial circumstance, would never have taken place, and which were destined to exercise the most important influence over two or three of the characters in this history.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER the scene in the library Lady Carlyon was taken upstairs by Dr. West in a half-hysterical condition, and then consigned to the care of Robson, who administered restoratives, and took precautions that no servant should be allowed access to her mistress's chamber.

Meanwhile, the physician and his patron were downstairs, deep in consultation.

"I must confess," said the former, "I am not altogether satisfied with the result of my experiment, for I had no idea Lady Carlyon would retain so distinct an impression of what had occurred. However, I did my best, so you cannot attach any blame to me."

"I don't blame you," returned Sir Ascot, moodily, "but I really think I have got myself into deeper difficulties than before. You heard what she said about publishing the affair. I know her quite well enough to be sure she is capable of accomplishing her threat, and then think of the consequences!"

"I know—they would mean ruin for both."

"Yes, and a criminal prosecution as well."

"It must never come to that. Surely we shall be able to find means of preventing it!" exclaimed Dr. West, biting his moustache in angry perplexity. "The only thing we can trust to is time. Women never stop to con-

sider—they act on the spur of the moment, reckless of consequences; but if you can make them pause, if you force them to think of ulterior results, then there is a chance of their listening to reason. You must virtually imprison your wife for a time."

"But how? I dare not do it in this house."

"No, I never thought of suggesting such a thing. I have an idea much more likely to succeed. You have heard me mention my brother-in-law—Felton?"

"Yes."

"Well, he has taken a house in W—shire for the purpose of receiving patients who are not quite capable of taking care of themselves—or, if you like it better, whose relatives desire to be relieved of the responsibility of taking care of them. His place is in the heart of the country, very lonely, and well guarded, and he asks no questions concerning his patients, which, you must acknowledge, is a great advantage. I would suggest your placing your wife there for an indefinite period—say until she swears a solemn oath to hold her tongue as to what has taken place."

Sir Ascot pondered the advice for a few minutes. He had gone too far to retreat now, and if he let matters stay as they were he would probably find himself in a dilemma from which there was no chance of extricating himself. No, he must go on in the evil path he had chosen, let it lead him where it might.

This is the usual result of a bad beginning. The consequences of an evil action are like the circles that eddy round a stone that is thrown in the water—widening, until they stretch over the whole of a life.

When Sir Ascot began his system of persecuting his wife he had fancied a little perseverance on his part would be all that was required, and would probably have recoiled with horror from the notion of imprisoning her in a private lunatic asylum; but now it commended itself as being the only feasible plan, and he became anxious that it should be put in execution.

"What about the necessary preliminaries—the certificates, &c.?" he asked.

"Oh, I will arrange all that. I will telegraph for a doctor I know to come down from London, and when I tell him I have examined the case, and pronounced an opinion, he will accept his fee and make no difficulties. I think you may leave that to me, Sir Ascot."

The baronet thought so too, and Dr. West justified his confidence, for the next morning, the physician from town arrived, had a consultation with Dr. West, a few minutes' talk with Lady Carlyon, then shook his elderly head, said it was a "bad case," wrote out a certificate, ate a good lunch, and drank no inconsiderable quantity of Sir Ascot's Madeira, and, after pocketing a substantial fee, returned to Cavendish-square with the impression that he had done rather a good stroke of business.

The task of conveying poor Alicia from the Chase presented very few difficulties, for although she resolutely declined to take any of Dr. West's medicines, it was easy enough for Robson to administer a drug that rendered her unconscious of what was going on around her, and afterwards she retained no distinct impression of the journey beyond the fact of being borne swiftly along in a closed carriage, Dr. West opposite her, and Robson at her side.

When she quite recovered her senses she found herself in a room that was strange to her—a rather lofty apartment, resplendent of the damp smell that is generated by unoccupied houses, and with a barred window that was further darkened by the shade of an immense cedar, whose boughs nearly touched the frosted panes. She turned round and saw Robson at her side, dark, impassive, as usual, and engaged in her customary occupation of knitting.

Strange to say, some instinct gave Lady Carlyon a suspicion of what had happened—her mind, so far from being weakened by the opiate administered, seemed to have become keener and more vigorous.

"I am not at home, Robson," she said, quietly, raising herself on her elbow, and looking round.

"No, my lady."

"What house is this?"

"One Sir Ascot has selected for you to live in, so as to be under the constant care of a physician—Dr. West's brother-in-law, whose master of the house."

"Is Sir Ascot here?"

"No, he went away directly he saw you safely to the end of your journey. He told me to tell you he would come again at the expiration of a week, and see if you were more reasonable than you had been at the Chase—those were his exact words," said Robson, going on with her knitting, and not raising her eyes.

Alicia was silent for a few minutes, striving to thoroughly realise her position. Presently she laid her hand on her maid's wrist.

"Robson," she said, a pathetic quiver in her voice that she tried in vain to restrain, "they accuse me of being mad, and they would shut me up here in order to persuade the world of the truth of their wicked invention. Will you not help me? You who know I am not mad!"

Robson quietly removed the slim fingers, and went on with her work.

"My lady, I am only an ignorant woman, and I should not presume to set up my opinion against that of doctors who have studied the subject all their lives, and therefore know all about it."

"Then," exclaimed Alicia, "do you mean me to infer that you think they are right?"

"I do not think anything at all, my lady. People in my position obey orders without thinking."

The woman was as hard as steel, and as cold. Prayers and entreaties would have affected her nature as much as a shower of rain affects a rock, and this Lady Carlyon recognised.

She had only one interest in life—herself; only one object—self-aggrandisement. Sir Ascot paid her well at present, and more than that, she saw in him a mine of wealth in the future, for would she not have a hold on him in the knowledge she possessed! and would he not secure her a handsome income for keeping it secret!

So far from feeling pity for Lady Carlyon, she was inclined to regard her as a woman who had had chances, and who had not availed herself of them. She did not like her—she did not dislike her. Her feelings in all that did not concern herself were apt to be neutral, and they were in this instance.

Alicia made a desperate effort to keep herself calm; she saw how much depended on her demeanour now, and she resolved that come what might she would not give way to the despair that was threatening to overmaster her.

"What is the name of the man who keeps this house?" she asked, and Robson was astonished at the composure of her tone and manner.

"Dr. Felton."

"Has he a wife?"

"No, she is dead, I believe."

"I suppose I can see him!"

"I have no doubt you can if you wish, my lady."

"Then kindly ring the bell, and inquire for him."

Robson did as she was requested, and the bell was answered by a woman who unlocked the door before she came in, and looked it again after having received Lady Carlyon's message.

Presently Dr. Felton himself entered—a middle-aged man, with a yellow face, and no hair on the top of his head, but with a big, bushy, black beard, and glittering black eyes, that lent a curiously sardonic expression to his countenance.

He bowed, and took a seat opposite Alicia, who had risen from her couch, and now stood beside it, one hand resting on the head.

"You wished to see me, Lady Carlyon?"

"Yes, I want to ask you on what ground you are keeping me here!" she said, steadily, though her heart sank as she saw the kind of man she had to deal with.



THE DRIVER PULLED UP SHARPLY, BUT THE SHAFT HAD STRUCK HUBERT IN THE CHEST.

"Your husband's authority."

"Are you under the impression that I am not in my right senses?"

"I hold the certificates of two doctors to that effect," he returned, unavely.

"And you believe what they say?"

"I have no reason to doubt it."

Alicia drew a long breath, and pressed both her hands across her breast.

"Do you really mean me to understand that you think the woman who speaks to you at this moment is insane?" she demanded, looking him full in the face.

He returned her gaze unflinchingly.

"Perhaps not at the present moment. In our worst cases we have lucid intervals; but, although at this precise juncture you may be perfectly sane and answerable for your actions, I have no guarantee that by this time to-morrow you will not be a raving lunatic."

"Do you think it likely?"

"As likely as not."

"But I tell you it is not so! I am no more mad than yourself. I am sane, and it is in order that my husband may avail himself of my money that he has resorted to such vile measures for getting me out of the way. Sir!" she came towards him, her hands outstretched, her voice faltering for the first time—"you are an Englishman—a gentleman—will you not prove your right to both those titles by helping a persecuted woman who cannot help herself! For the sake of those you love, for the sake of your own children, if you have any; for the sake of the mother who cared for and tended your infancy, I beg you to release me!"

He heard her unmoved. Once he put his hand to his moustache as if to conceal a smile, and his eyes, as they scanned her fair, troubled face, never lost their hard expression.

"Madam, you ask me a thing that is impossible, at all events at present. Only time will permit me to judge of your mental condition, and when some weeks have expired I may be in a position to tell you my own opinion regarding your case;

at present I can do nothing but acquiesce in the judgments arrived at by your medical attendant and a distinguished London physician. I deeply regret the necessity that compels me to say this"—he rose as he spoke, apparently with the intention of leaving—"but if your state of mind is what you say it is, you will recognise the fact that I have no alternative."

She saw that nothing she could say would produce any impression on him, that words, in effect, were so much waste of breath. Whatever he thought of her it was clear he was resolved she should not go away.

"Very well, then," she said, quietly. "I suppose I must submit, and bear my fate as well as I can. Will you tell me what rules or restrictions I am to be under?"

"Not very hard ones. You will certainly have to confine yourself to these two apartments, your bedroom and sitting-room; but you will be allowed an hour's exercise every day in the grounds, in company with your own attendant."

"And books, papers—are they allowed me?"

"I regret to say not. Sir Ascot's orders are strict on the subject. He desires you shall have nothing at all to excite you, and I am forced to agree in the wisdom of his decision."

"I may have writing materials, surely?"

"That would be even worse than books," observed Dr. Felton, shrugging his shoulders.

"No, you are to observe the most perfect quiet, as that is supposed to be the only means of your regaining your mental equilibrium. I am afraid I must leave you now," he added, looking at his watch. "I have an appointment in a few minutes that I am bound to keep. Good-day, Lady Carlyon; I sincerely hope the repose that you will enjoy under my roof may prove beneficial to you."

He bowed with punctilious politeness, and retired, locking the door after him.

No sooner had he gone than all Alicia's calmness deserted her, and she flew to the window, first of sitting-room then of bedroom, and examined them, both with the same result. The

bars were firm; and, besides, the distance to the ground was too great for anyone to think of jumping, even if they had not been. Of course, too, both doors were locked.

"If I am not mad now this place is enough to drive me mad," she muttered to herself, as she sat down again on hearing Robson's step outside the door.

Rebellion, as she knew, was useless. She might weep more tears than Niobe, they could be of no avail. She might shriek her loudest, no one would hear her. All she could do was to submit—at least with a semblance of calmness—to a destiny against which she was powerless to battle.

Sometimes a terrible despair seized upon her, and a fervent prayer went up from the bottom of her heart that Heaven would take her to itself, for life was growing a burden too great to be borne. Then thoughts of little Douglas came, and the desire to live revived, for if she went who would there be to look after him in the future?

She grew pale and thin and haggard, her appetite failed, and she was unable to sleep. Oh! the dreariness of the long, long nights, when she lay listening to the beating of the rain on the windows, the mournful sobbing of the wind round the chimneys, while nearer was a sound that disturbed her still more—the noise of rats eating at the wainscot.

Awful visions came to her—memories of stories she had read in her girlhood, where rats had come and gnawed at living people, and imagination pictured them so powerfully that she would start up shrieking, and fancying she felt the vermin crawling over her.

She was not allowed a light, or all these terrors might have been avoided, but it was one of the rules of the place that none of the patients should have the mercy of a candle vouchsafed them. And who shall say what fiendish motive prompted the restriction, or how many were really bereft of their senses by the terrors of the lonely midnight darkness?

(To be continued.)



MAJOR LUSHINGTON THEN STEPPED BACK TO HAVE A GOOD LOOK AT HER.

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

—O—

CHAPTER XLVI.

PLOTS AND PLANS

SWAYED by a stronger will than her own, Sibel Fitzgerald came downstairs; but she did not venture to the closed door, beyond which Dudley Wentworth was lying. His father stayed with him all the afternoon; but Hugh went in and out, and finally settled down to write letters. When he had finished he got up with a sense of satisfaction. One was addressed to the Earl of Windsor, the other to Cyrus Springfield, Esq., at his place of business in Mark-lane.

Soon, by the help of these two men, he hoped to have a clear case against Major Lushington, but until he had it in black and white he thought it best to hold his tongue and take no one into his confidence.

The post brought a letter from General Forrester to Sibel, enclosing bank notes to the amount of two hundred pounds, which he hoped would be sufficient for her expenses, as he did not feel justified in making a larger advance. He stated that he had been induced to give his consent to her marriage by a regard for her happiness, which he supposed to be indisputably connected with Major Lushington; and as he considered that an absence of two years was sufficient to mark his disapproval of her former conduct, he would be happy to let the marriage take place from under the roof of Coombe Lodge!

"Oh, no!" said Sibel, involuntarily.

"What's the matter?" asked Hugh, looking up.

"The General wants me to be married from Coombe Lodge!"

"I should like to see my uncle allowing it!"

"But I suppose it would be better," resting her head wearily on her hand.

"Ask him, and you will see. I wonder where

Windsor is likely to be! Shooting somebody else's partridges, I suppose, as he is letting his own alone. By the bye, I saw his mother's carriage in Thornfield yesterday; so she is back."

"I would give anything to see her!"

"Let us go over there to-morrow, whilst uncle takes care of Dudley. What do you want to see her for? Anything particular?"

"Only to give me some advice about my trousseau," her head drooping. "I have no one to help me—no one to give me a word of counsel."

"Unfortunately that I can't be a woman for once," with a smile, "but remember, whatever you do don't have anything marked!"

"What do you mean?"

"It would be awkward afterwards to have to pick out an L," biting the top of his pen.

"I don't think it's worth while to talk of the time when I shall be a widow!" with a sudden coldness. "I am sure I shall go first!"

"I was not talking of that, or thinking of it for a moment; but—but there might be a wedding with a change of bridegroom."

"Hugh, never say that again!" an indignant blush rising in her cheeks.

"Don't be angry. Whatever I do, you know, I want you to be happy."

"You want everyone else to be except yourself. Oh! why can't you be! I should be so intensely glad."

"Cut yourself into two, and then I might."

"But Rose is so sweet, and so pretty."

"Rose is sweet, but you are sweeter. Rose is pretty, but you—" he broke off and came towards her, his eyes glowing. "You! I can't say what you are; I can only feel. Don't think I am thoroughly down in the mouth. I was cut up at first—quite done for—and then it came across me what a selfish brute I was. I wasn't half worthy of you. I should never have made you happy; and nothing could have been worse than that," his voice sinking.

"But one day, when you are a little older, I hope—"

"Don't hope about it!" he interrupted hastily. "I shall never live to be old, or even middle-aged. Let me do some good for you and Dudley, that is all I ask for." Then he left the room abruptly, and Lord Wentworth came in asking for tea.

He sat down in his arm chair, looking very grave; and Sibel felt like a naughty child.

"My dear, you ought to have told me."

"But I was so afraid. I thought it would worry you."

"Nothing could worry me so much as the fact that you, living here under my care, should hesitate to speak to me on a matter of the most vital importance, because you were afraid of giving me a headache," with quiet contempt. "Sibel, you have grieved me more than I can tell you; however, I have no control over you, and all I can do now is, to see that matters are arranged as satisfactory as they can be."

"Oh, don't say that," the tears streaming down her cheeks. "There is nobody to control me but yourself. Tell me what to do, and I'll do it."

"What, shut the door after the mare is stolen!" with a smile half sad, and half amused.

"Yesterday my advice might have been of some service; to-day I shall not give it, because it is too late. But I place my house, as far as I can, at your disposal, and you must ask what friends you like."

Sibel brought him her uncle's letter and laid it on his knee. He read it with heightened colour, and when he had finished it, said very quietly,—

"Would you allow me to put it into the fire? It would be a slight gratification to my feelings."

He watched it crumbling to pieces amongst the burning logs with such an expression on his face as Sibel had never seen there before. "Don't tell me that man is a gentleman, for I can never believe it. Oh, my poor child!" putting his arm round her, and resting his white hair on her soft brown curls; "if you had only belonged to

me from the first what misery might have been spared!"

The next day Sibel and Hugh rode over to the Court, and were fortunate enough to find Lady Windsor at home. At first she was disposed to be huffy about Sibel's marriage, but when she found that the poor girl was without a single woman friend to advise her, her kind heart relented, and she offered to undertake the ordering of the trousseau.

It was agreed that she should take Sibel up to town the very next morning, to her own particular dressmaker; and she looked forward with delight to seeing her pretty figure set off by appropriate garments.

"He ought to have sent you five hundred at least—the stinky old screw! as Windsor would call him—but never mind, we will do our best, and be as economical as we can. Ah, my poor boy!" Sibel blushed; "what are we to do about him? It is just the time when he is coming home with a large party for the pheasant shooting. I suppose you will have to ask him; but he will feel very bad. Send us that rosebud of a cousin to console him, and that long-legged brother. You will be glad to be rid of some of them; and we can take in as many as you like."

"Take the General and his wife off my uncle's hands, and we shall all owe you a debt of gratitude," said Hugh, earnestly.

"Very well," with a smile; "and how about yourself?"

"My post is at home, I couldn't leave it. Do you think a letter addressed to the club is likely to find your son?"

"In course of time. I believe he has them forwarded in weekly packets, so that you had better put 'Immediate' on the cover if you want an answer directly. Now, do tell me how is the invalid hero?"

"Not so well," said Hugh; Sibel having retreated towards the conservatory. "Doctor Seymour says he has had a narrow shave of brain fever, and he must be kept as quiet as possible."

"Brain fever! That is serious. All this fuss about the wedding will be very bad for him."

Macdonald smiled, as if at some private thought.

"It is to be very quiet for many reasons."

"Do you think she loves him?" in a whisper.

"She intends to marry him," very gravely.

"I never thought that it would come to that. My poor boy vowed that he would prevent it."

"I wish him good luck."

"If he prevented it he would go in and win," looking at him very earnestly.

"Or take an even chance with the rest. Lady Windsor, I promise you one thing."

"And what is that?" intensely interested.

"That either with her will, or against her will, she shall be prevented from marrying Lushington on the thirteenth!"

"You really mean it? Then I had better not hurry too much with the trousseau."

"It will be ready for another time," all the excitement dying out of his face.

She laid her thin, aristocratic hand on his coat-sleeve, and smiled up into his earnest eyes.

"Perhaps her name, after all, will be Macdonald."

He started as if he had been stung.

"Never! I'm not one quarter good enough!"

"I only wish that I had still one unmarried daughter, that I might have a chance of calling you my son."

"You are too good!" as he stooped to kiss her hand.

Then Sibel came back from the conservatory, and remarked that they should be late for luncheon if they did not start at once.

Lady Windsor stood at the top of the broad flight of steps to watch them as they rode quietly down the Park, the sunlight shining on Sibel's bright hair and burnishing it almost to gold; whilst Hugh turned round with his foreign grace and waved his hat to her from the distance.

Just in the same way his father had looked back as he rode away from the Court, and the next time she saw him he was lying cold and still,

with the smile that had stolen the heart from her breast stamped for ever on his lips by the hand of death. Pray Heaven there was a better fate in store for his son.

No answer came from Mr. Springfield; but Lord Windsor telegraphed to say that he had wired Lushington to make a clean breast of everything before he married Miss Fitzgerald, or else he would feel justified in getting all the information he could from another source.

This he did, not because he had any hope of Lushington's confessing, but in order to save himself from the accusation of playing him a nasty trick behind his back.

Major Lushington telegraphed back to say that he wondered what the deuce Windsor was driving at. His directions were things of the past, and could in no way affect his marriage. He was good enough to add his opinion of the Earl's interference, which he summed up as "a confounded impertinence!"

Windsor then hastily wrote to Hugh—

"Springfield's your man. I'm in the dark; know there's something shady, but he's sifted the matter to the bottom. Prime fun for him. Catch him by the scruff of his neck, bring him down to the Chestnuts, shut him up in a room with old Wentworth, and I bet you three to one his ponies that Lushington is kicked out of the house by the whole lot of you. Then, coast clear, I go in, win straight off, have you for best man, church bells, and there's an end of it!—Yours,"

"WINDSOR"

"P.S.—Look sharp."

And the reply was—

"Springfield's away. I'm after him like a shot. They don't know where he's gone—fancy Egypt. I leave everything in your hands, with Phil Forrester to help. Mind the wedding must be stopped till I come back. Write to me at Shepherd's Hotel, Alexandria; and mind, not a word to anyone. Watch over her for Heaven's sake.—Yours,"

"HUGH MACDONALD."

A bulkier epistle was sent to Phil, and then to the surprise of everyone at the Chestnuts, Hugh announced that he was going abroad for a short time.

"I daresay it will do you good," said Lord Wentworth, thoughtfully, "for you've been looking terribly washed out. But couldn't you put it off till after the wedding, when Dudley can spare you better?"

"No; you will want me then, when Sibel's gone."

"Then you won't be with us on the thirteenth?"

"That I shall, if I die for it! Mind, she is not to be married without me to look on," with great earnestness.

"Poor boy!" soliloquised Lord Wentworth, "the preparations are driving him mad; but he insists upon being here to the last, lest his absence should give her pain. Unselfish to the core! Would to Heaven I could make him happy!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

"HE MUST GIVE YOU UP!"

THREE weeks to the wedding—only three weeks—and at the end she would be Sibel Lushington, and every hope of happiness would be given up with her name of Fitzgerald. Fortunately at this miserable period of her existence our little heroine had not much time for thought, or else she must have broken down. Presents kept pouring in from all sides, and had to be acknowledged in pretty little notes of the stereotyped pattern, till she grew so sick of writing them that Hugh proposed that she should have a printed formula fitted for all occasions:—

"So many thanks—quite too lovely—shall value it more than any other. Ever so kind to think of yours gratefully,"

"SIBEL FITZGERALD."

He was going off by the afternoon train, and came into the library to bid her good-bye. She put both hands in his, and looked fondly up into his handsome face. "Mind you take it easily, and stop a long time wherever you find it pleasant. I wish somebody were going with you to take care of you."

"I daresay I shall pick up a companion. Remember, I leave Dudley in your charge," looking at her fixedly. "I could not go away unless I knew that you were here to look after the poor old fellow instead of me. Promise me that you will."

"But I don't know," she hesitated, whilst a crimson blush dyed her cheeks like a sunset.

"Promise, or I shall have no peace. Sibel you never were selfish before!"

"Will he want me?"

"He asked for you to-day, and I said you were coming to read to him directly I had gone. Cool of me, wasn't it?"

"You always were cool," with a smile.

"And I am going to be cooler still. Do you remember how I told you that I hoped to do some good for you and Dudley before I died. I am trying to do it now. If I never come back you will think of that—you will know I tried."

"But you are coming back before you—you said you would."

"Yes, I am coming back if I can; be sure of that. Have you any belief in presenciments?"

"Sometimes," she said, vaguely.

"Would you ever act upon them? Now, for instance, supposing I were quite well, and yet had a feeling that the end was not far off,"—his voice vibrating with intense emotion—"would you let me have what you promised to give me before I died?"

"Oh, Hugh, you shan't go!" taking hold of his coat in a sudden panic.

He put his arm gently round her, and drew her to his heart. "It wouldn't be sad for me, dear, if I left you both happy behind."

"I couldn't be happy without you," and she began to sob.

"There, don't cry, I can't bear it! Dudley could make you happy, if the rest of the world were gone. It is to give him to you that I am going. Oh! darling, you shall never cry again, but sing for joy the whole day long. Good-bye! Kiss me, dear—I shall never ask for another," in a low voice.

She put her arms round his neck and clung to him; "Don't go!"

A quiver of pain passed over his face. Then he stooped his head quickly, and pressed his eager lips to hers—one long, clinging kiss, whilst the surging passions in his boyish heart were mastered, and every personal hope renounced. Then he unwound her clinging arms, and placing her gently in a chair, and kneeling down before her, kissed her small cold hands.

"Look at me, dearest, once before I go."

She raised her lashes and their eyes met; in hers was a wild regret at the sorrow of parting—in his a beautiful smile as of a martyr of old, when earthly longings were conquered, and pain and suffering passed.

Then he rose and went out of the room with a resolute step, and she sprang up to stop him, just to see the dog-cart whirling him away to the station.

Wheeled down by a terrible fear, Sibel sat for some time perfectly still, with an intense longing in her heart to go after Hugh and bring him back by force. She had been so stupefied—and scarcely said a word, when, if she had only implored him to stay, no doubt he would have given up his hateful journey—as he was always ready to surrender his own pleasure for that of others. Then his words came back to her, although she had been too much engrossed with her concern for him to pay much heed to them when they were said. What had he meant by saying that he was going to do good to her—and Dudley! Their case was past praying for, and nothing could help them now, unless the steamer in which Major Lushington was coming over to England chose to founder in the Atlantic.

Minton, Dudley Wentworth's own man, knocked at the door, and said that his master

sent his compliments to Miss Fitzgerald, and if she had nothing else to do would she come and finish the book which Mr. Macdonald had begun.

Surprised and confused, she said she would come at once, and ran upstairs to bathe her eyes and smooth her hair in a flutter. If this was a proof of Hugh's thoughtfulness she would much rather have been without it. Surely it was her duty to keep out of Dudley's way as much as she possibly could, and yet the boy's object seemed to be to throw them together, in spite of everything.

She was terribly nervous as she went into his room, but at the first sight of his face she forgot everything else. She had not seen him for a week, and the change consequent on his attack of fever gave her quite a shock.

Lord Wentworth was sitting at the foot of the bed, but he rose as she came in and put a chair for her with his usual courtesy, near the head. Dudley's eyes—looking large enough to swallow all the rest of his face—were fixed upon her with an earnest gaze, which troubled her so much that she could scarcely falter out such a trivial civility as to hope he was better.

"Thanks. I am getting on," in a voice that sounded low and cavernous. "My father thought you would not mind."

"Of course not—is this the book?" taking up a novel that laid in masculine fashion face downwards on a little table, nervously anxious to stop all conversation.

When she began to read her voice was hoarse and tremulous, but as she went on the powerful writing drew her out of herself, and she forgot her own sufferings in those of the heroine.

Lord Wentworth dropped asleep as usual. Minton looked in to see if his services were required, and to pour out the dose of medicine at the prescribed hour; but Sibel continued to read, encouraged by the constant attention of the invalid, until it was time to dress for dinner.

As she stood before her looking-glass fastening her necklace round her white throat, it seemed to her impossible that her second meeting with Dudley Wentworth had come and gone with so little excitement. There could be no danger for either whilst he lay there, helpless as a log, with scarcely the power to interest himself in anything around him. Evidently he had reached that stage where resignation is possible, because the will has lost the power to rebel.

Day after day she sat with him for a longer or shorter period, in spite of the multifarious calls on her time, thrusting all her most pressing business on the most inconvenient hours, in order to be ready to come to him whenever he wanted her. (Oh! Hugh, it is your doing; surely you will have a great deal to answer for!) Lord Wentworth was always there, and Minton or Landon came in and out on various errands, whilst Sibel sat as quietly as an automaton at its appointed task.

Time flew; one week tripped on the heels of another, till only seven days were left between expectation and the curse of its reality; still the girl read out in her low, sweet voice, with outward composure, whilst her heart seemed ready to burst within her breast.

Dudley's calmness helped to keep her feelings under control; for she would have died of shame if she had betrayed herself when his quiet coldness kept up the barrier between them. But the trial was a severe one; and there were times when she could have flung the book to the other end of the room, herself on her knees, and her around his neck, in defiance of either promises or proprieties.

"Colonel Spencer is in the drawing-room!" Lord Wentworth rose from his seat, and with a polite, "Don't wait for me, my dear," followed Manton out of the room.

They were alone!

Sibel cleared her throat, and turned over the page, resolved to go on reading as if nothing had happened. A little hairpin fell out of her curls on to the Indian rug which was thrown over the invalid. She stretched out her hand to pick it up, but before she could draw it back it was taken prisoner.

"My little Belle," he said softly. "You have been very good to me."

She sat still and trembled.

"I didn't want to worry you the other day," speaking very slowly and panting for breath.

She did not dare to look at him, and the only wish she was conscious of was that she might suddenly be stricken deaf with one ear.

"I must just tell you this," trying to raise his heavy head. "When Lushington comes, send him to me. He must give you up!"

She shook her head, and shyly but firmly drew her hand away. When Lord Wentworth came back he noticed nothing except that wistful passages in the book lost some of their flavour by being repeated in a doleful voice.

On the Monday before the wedding Major Lushington arrived late in the evening—half smothered in Canadian furs. He was looking thin and pale, but seemed to be in excellent spirits as he came into the library, the first snowflakes of the year shining on his long coat.

He clasped Sibel's hand in both his own, kissed her cheek rapturously, and then stepped back to have a good look at her.

"Pon my word! I thought you were as nice as you could be before I went away, but I believe you've improved. There's not a Canadian girl to come up to you—and they are considered pretty charming in their way. Thank goodness I've got you for a few moments to myself! but I suppose that odious boy, Macdonald, will be popping in upon us presently."

"No, he's away from home," and Sibel subsided into a chair, considering that she was less accessible there than on a sofa; but Major Lushington was not easily rebuffed. He took another chair, and drew it close to hers, running his arm along the back of it behind her head.

"Thank the Lord for all his mercies!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Oh, my darling, you don't know what it has been to me to be without you for all these years," he added, after a pause, as his eyes dwelt lovingly on her small pale face. "To look at you, one might really believe that you had been pluing; but that's not likely, is it? Have you given a thought to me, or wanted me back?"

"Certainly not," trying to speak playfully. "You chose to go away, so of course I didn't mind."

"It wasn't a case of choice," his face changing. "I've been unlucky from beginning to end; but the luck's changing now. When I've got you for my own little wife, I shall grumble at nothing!" and he stooped with the intention of kissing her, but she got up quickly and rang the bell.

"What did you do that for!" he exclaimed, in vexation.

"Because I knew that you must be starving. Lord Wentworth sent you a thousand apologies for not being here to receive you."

"Do you know I've done very well without him!" with a comical glance.

"But he will come to you directly after you have had your supper. Mr. Wentworth, you know, is very ill."

"I hope you don't think it necessary to nurse him?"

No answer.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"TAKE THIS—AND FORGET!"

TUESDAY morning—and still no news of Hugh. He might have been corresponding with his new confidant, Lord Windsor, but not a line did he send to "The Chestnuts," and Sibel was nearly worn out with this new anxiety. That something had happened to him she felt quite sure; and was surprised that neither Lord Wentworth nor his son seemed to participate in her fears.

The Forresters were to arrive at the Court on Wednesday afternoon; and there was to be a dinner party in the evening, to which both she and Lord Wentworth had been invited, but had declined to go. Major Lushington would sleep in town, and come down the next morning with his best man—Captain Everard.

The bridesmaids were Rose Forrester, two

cousins of Major Lushington's—the Ladies Daphne and Mircotis Lushington, daughters of the Earl of Wyndham, and Lady Alice Ponsonby, a small niece of Lady Windsor's, to whom Sibel had taken a great fancy.

As most of them were pretty, it was expected that they would look very nice.

Major Lushington was to bring down the bridal bouquet, and small pearl brooches also, in the shape of a star for the bridesmaids' bonnet-strings.

Everyone prayed for fine weather, as the whole effect of the wedding-dresses would be spoiled by a drab-coloured day, and Rose Forrester prayed for something more, on which her whole happiness depended. If she had known that at that moment, whilst she was sighing and thinking there was no chance, Lord Windsor and her own brother were chuckling over a telegram from Hugh Macdonald, in which he said he should be at the Chestnuts the next day without fail, she might have had more faith in her prayers.

Lady Windsor drove over on Wednesday to see if there were no hopes of persuading Sibel to join their party, but she found that they had been up the whole night with Dudley, as a fresh accession of fever had tried his strength to the uttermost. He was still so ill that nothing would induce Lord Wentworth to leave him, and Sibel said she did not dare to leave the house.

"Dear dear, this is most annoying. Very strange these constant relapses! He was so much better yesterday Windsor told me. Did anything occur to upset him?" with a curious look into the little face which had grown so pale during the last few weeks.

"He sent for Major Lushington, and had a long talk with him," flushing deeply.

"They had a quarrel, my dear, depend on it. What a pity! It was too late in the day to do any good, and it might have killed Dudley. How did the Major look when he came out?"

"As white as this," touching her handkerchief, "and in a furious passion. But he told me nothing, so I don't know what it was about. It is rather hard for him, but everyone seems set against him."

"Those who carry off a coveted prize," tapping her cheek affectionately, "must expect to be hated. Good-bye, I mustn't wait another moment. It was rather a joke the Major asking my poor boy to be his best man, but I suppose he didn't know. Mind you blush like that tomorrow; it is very becoming. Shall I send over the bridesmaids to assist at your toilette? I believe that is the correct thing."

"Oh, no!" cried Sibel, in a fright, "please don't!"

"You queer little thing, I have a great mind to come and dress you myself!"

"That would be different; but a heap of strangers!" throwing up her hands with a gesture of disgust.

"Then I shall send over Rose and her brother, as I feel you ought to have some of your own kindred with you. Keep up your spirits, and mind—not a tear."

With this last earnest injunction the Countess took herself off, and Sibel went to her room, where her maid was waiting for instructions. Baskets of flowers, sent over from the Court, were standing about in every corner, and gardeners were consulting in the middle of the hall round a heap of evergreens. Under any other circumstances she would have been the first to interest herself in the decorations; but torn with conflicting anxieties and fears she had not the heart to look at a flower.

"My dear, if it is quite convenient to you, Dudley would like to see you for a few minutes," said Lord Wentworth, shortly after dinner.

"Oh, certainly! Shall I go now?" starting up from her seat, feeling that she could not sit there with an hour of expectation before her. She had dreaded a summons all the day, and yet her heart would nearly have broken with disappointment if it had not been given.

Once more she stood by the side of his bed, her hand in his, his large eyes fixed in vain regret upon her face. He was so weak that the slightest passing emotion brought beads of cold perspiration to his forehead. So weak, so

wasted, yet still with a noble beauty all his own, her heart went out to him with unspeakable tenderness, and one tear after another rolled down her cheeks.

"Good-bye, my little Belle!" the voice was so hoarse and low that she could scarcely catch the words "I had hoped it would be different—take this, and forget me!" With fingers that shook so that they could scarcely perform their simple office he slipped a plain gold ring, with an enormous pearl set round with diamonds, on to her third finger, then his head dropped wearily on his pillow, and his eyes closed.

She clasped her hands in terrible agitation, then gave him one yearning look of inexpressible longing, and stole from the room without a word, knowing that this was a last good-bye. It was better so for both of them; but, oh! how cruelly hard!

Meanwhile the dinner-party at the Court was a very cheerful one, in spite of the absentees. Lady Windsor wondered at the shouts of laughter which proceeded from the other end of the table; and said to herself that her poor boy bore it much better than she had expected. Certainly no one would have suspected Lord Windsor of low-spirits.

The King of the Mashers seemed to have changed his nature, and, in spite of his high collar, seemed to be bubbling over in a very un-mascherly state of excitement.

He was very attentive to Rose; and her mother saw with pleasure that the child's usually pale cheeks were flushed, and her eyes sparkling as if his attentions were infinitely welcome. She could not guess that the sparkle and the blush were owing to a whisper from Phil as they met at the drawing-room door.

"What are you thinking of so deeply, Miss Forrester?" inquired his royal highness, after a pause.

Rose looked up with a smile.

"I was only thinking how strange it was to think that by this time to-morrow my cousin would be Sibel Fitzgerald no longer."

Lord Windsor twinkled instead of looking annoyed.

"Bet you she will! What odds!"

"I never bet. Papa doesn't like it; but you know it is as certain as anything can be," looking up at him with grave eyes, and not seeing anything to laugh at, although Phil was kicking her under the table.

"Pon my life, I don't feel sure of it!"

"But there can't be anything to prevent it!"

"Accidents will happen—brains smash up—and a bridegroom's head is just as breakable as anyone else's."

"Still I feel quite sure of it," with a little laugh; "and am quite nervous at the idea of being the head bridesmaid."

"They didn't tell me that when I refused to be best man."

"Nor did they mention that my sister Judith was going to stay at home, or any fact equally interesting to you."

"I have not the honour of Miss Forrester's acquaintance, but having seen one I am content."

"Thanks! Having seen one—you don't want to see another! Very flattering."

He smiled, adjusted his pane of glass, and bowed.

"Having you I don't want anyone else—now do you understand?"

"Not at all—you can't get out of it."

"I don't wish to, so long as you are in the same box."

General Forrester was not enjoying himself so much as his daughter, or Lady Windsor, of malice prepense, would do nothing but sing his niece's praises.

"Such a charming girl! absolute refinement, united with the most engaging manners, and fascinating beauty! It is not often you meet with such a perfect ensemble. I cannot tell you how I shall miss her; and what will become of my old friend without her, I can't bear to think."

"He will have his son," said the General,

gruffly. "And by-and-by, I suppose, he will give him a daughter-in-law."

"I am afraid our little Sibel has ruined all chance of that for the present."

"How do you mean, I don't understand," and he nearly choked over his champagne.

"My dear General Forrester, it is not for me to tell you that your niece is quite irresistible, and that no man can see her without being captivated!"

And the Countess's eyes positively twinkled like her son's, as he looked at Mrs. Forrester, and rose from the table.

(To be continued.)

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

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CHAPTER XX.

ELFIE MAKES A BASH PROMISE.

WRAPPED in sealskin, travelling luxuriously with an old lady and her servant, who seemed to make it their business to watch over her, Elfie was so overcome with sleep that she found it quite impossible to keep her eyes open for any length of time.

The motion of the carriage, added to the fatigue of the previous night, and the subsequent excitement she had undergone, all had a somnolent effect upon her, and she slept unasily, quite oblivious of the direction in which she was going.

It was now the sixteenth of December. The winter bade fair to be a very severe one, and light flakes of snow were being whirled about like so many tiny feathers, giving promise later on of a very heavy downfall.

"I think we had better post on from Launceston without stopping more than half-an-hour," said Mrs. Penfold to Perran, as the train in which they were seated steamed along.

The woman assented; she very rarely did more than echo the sentiments of her mistress.

"Yes, I think we'll go straight ahead; we shan't get any comfort as any of the lions. It will take us four hours from the time we left Exeter before we reach Launceston, and when we get there it will take between five and six hours to drive to Trebartha; but if there is a heavy fall of snow to-night, driving over such a road will be next to impossible to-morrow."

"I don't think you'll find it pleasant to drive by Lameast and Wilsey Downs to-night in a snow-storm," remarked Perran, drily.

Mrs. Penfold had not thought of this.

So far from being pleasant such a drive would be well-nigh impossible, for the road at the best of times was wild and dreary, and with deep snow on the ground it would be almost impassable.

There was very little daylight left when they got into the train at Exeter, and it was close upon nine o'clock when they entered the White Hart at Launceston.

But this time the light feathery snow had been succeeded by large heavy flakes, which came down with a will, as though they were in a hurry, and they were so thick, and fell so close together, that the whole atmosphere seemed full of them.

"I suppose we can't get any man to drive us to Trebartha to-night, can we?" asked Mrs. Penfold of the landlord, who knew her well by sight and reputation.

"Not if you were to offer a hundred pounds, ma'am!" was the answer. "The coach won't run to-morrow, and I doubt much if you'll get home for some days."

"But I will get home to-morrow!" said the lady, in a determined tone, "or I'll know the reason why! We want rooms, and fires lighted in them, and supper, as quick as you can. This young lady is not quite well. How do you feel now, dear?"

This to Elfie, who was looking pale, and even ill with the half-sleep in which she had indulged, for, not being able to rest in a comfortable

position, there was no real refreshment in the dozing condition in which she had travelled.

Well wrapped up though she had been, she had felt the cold, and her limbs were stiff and aching, and gave her pain wherever she moved.

There was a fine fire burning in the sitting-room into which they were ushered, and soon the chilled feeling passed away, assisted in doing so no doubt by the tempting cutlets and hot negus which Mrs. Penfold had prescribed.

After supper the ladies retired to their own rooms; but when they rose the next morning, it was a white world that they looked out upon.

Elfie, however, had quite regained her usual vivacity and cheerfulness.

The sight of the snow was positively exhilarating, and she felt such a temptation to be out in it, that she laughingly suggested to Perran that they should go into the garden and have a game at snowballing.

To her unqualified dismay, the woman who had been regarding her with her usual steady stare, instead of answering her in words, broke into a passionate flood of tears, then, covering her face with her hands, she fled from the room.

Elfie turned and looked blankly at Mrs. Penfold as she asked,—

"What have I said to disturb Perran in this manner?"

"I don't know, child; she is a strange woman," was she untroubled answer.

"Perhaps it was a silly suggestion," pursued Elfie; "but there was nothing unkind in it, and I feel as though quicksilver were running through my veins, and as if I should dearly like a good run in the snow."

"You had better put on your things and go for a run then," said the old lady, stolidly; "but you will soon have enough of it, the cold is intense. As for Perran, you mustn't take the least notice of her; she's very odd, and doesn't seem quite right at times."

Then Mrs. Penfold took up a pen, and opening a blotting-book, began to jot up figures and look up some accounts; and Elfie, taking this as a hint that her company could be dispensed with, went to dress herself for her walk.

"I suppose I am not likely to lose myself," she remarked, as she came into the sitting-room, looking like a young princess in her rich furs, and with a beauty of countenance that many a queen might have envied.

Mrs. Penfold herself looked at her strangely, but she recovered herself quickly as she replied,—

"No, you are not likely to lose yourself, but don't stay long. I have made up my mind to get to Trebartha before night comes on, let the landlord of this place say what he likes about the horses and the road."

Elfie promised to be back soon, and went out, not venturing to make a plea for the horses, knowing the old lady far too well to suppose it would have any other effect than to make her more determined than ever to have her own way.

In a few minutes Elfie had forgotten Mrs. Penfold and Perran as she walked through the streets of the picturesque little town, which now wore a very quaint appearance, by reason of the snow, which had been drifted into grotesque shapes in some places, leaving other spots bare, and looking soft and shining, like powdered sugar in the clear frosty air.

The castle, which rises on a rock, and commands the town, had the appearance of a beneficent giant with the morning sunlight gleaming on his garb of snow, and Elfie, who had come out to be pleased, was delighted with all she saw.

She had picked up a local guide in the inn, and would have been glad to explore the town, and to visit all the places of interest described therein, but this could not be done at present, and promising herself that pleasure on a future occasion, she reluctantly retraced her steps.

Arrived at the White Hart, she observed for the first time the fine Norman doorway

that had been brought from the Priory, and, on entering the house, she found Mrs. Penfold triumphant.

A carriage and a pair of strong horses were to be ready in half-an-hour, and the mistress of Trebartha had ordered a plentiful supply of sandwiches and some sherry-and-water to be packed for their refreshment on the way.

From what she had heard of the country they would have to drive through, Elsie had some grave doubts about the wisdom of this step, but she forbore to give expression to her misgivings, and after a very early luncheon the party set off on the most tedious part of their journey.

For the first few miles Elsie was interested in looking out of the carriage window, but after a time, the white robe that was over everything became monotonous, and she was glad to lean back in the corner of her carriage and close her eyes, which ached with the glare of the snow.

The horses found the roads rough and heavy, and they were obliged to stay for some time at Camelford, and to make another long halt at Wade Bridge, so that it was long after nightfall before the carriage, drawn by weary steeds, toiled up the last steep hill and entered the wide gates of Trebartha Castle.

What the place was like Elsie could not tell in the darkness, and she was too weary to look about her.

So she followed Mrs. Penfold into a spacious hall, in which men in armour seemed to be standing against the wall while bows and arrows, swords and spears, firearms, and a couple of tattered flags reminded her of a visit which she had once paid to the Tower of London, accompanied by one of the governesses at the school and several of her fellow-pupils.

Crossing this hall the mistress of Trebartha led the way into a small room, where a large fire was burning, and where the shaded lamps threw a mellow light upon the handsome, heavy furniture, and the well-spread table that was waiting for them.

For Mrs. Penfold had despatched a mounted messenger before she started from Launceston with a letter to her house steward, and consequently there had been time to prepare for her arrival.

"I am too tired to leave my room again if I once go into it," remarked the mistress of the house, as she allowed Perran to take off her bonnet and cloak; "but you can do as you like, Miss Heath. I will give you ten minutes if you like to go to your room. I shall begin dinner then, whether you are here or not."

"Thank you; I should like to bathe my face and hands," was the answer; "and I will be back in time. Won't you keep me waiting?"

"I shan't wait," was the characteristic reply.

But Elsie was getting used to the old lady's abrupt ways.

She had come to the conclusion that Mrs. Penfold's bark was worse than her bite. How far this was from being the case time alone could teach her.

A bell was rung, and a country girl about her own age answered it promptly.

"Take Miss Heath to her room, Tamzen," said the mistress of the castle, "and whenever she rings her bell it will be your duty to answer it."

The girl bent her head, and seem pleased at the new duty imposed upon her; then she led the way up a wide oak staircase, and along a curious corridor to a door, which she opened, going first into a large, well-furnished room, which looked warm and cosy in the fitful fire-light.

Tamzen had brought a lamp with her, and this she placed upon a table.

Then she volunteered to fetch hot water, and on her return she remarked,—

"I'll wait outside the room, miss, to take you back; you mayn't find your way at first in this strange place."

Elsie thanked her.

She liked the face of the Cornish handmaiden, who, by no means beautiful, had the fresh comeliness and gentle, frank manners peculiar to her class in her country.

When Elsie opened the door and stepped out of the room, having divested herself of her fur jacket and other wraps, she was not a little surprised to see Tamzen fall back a step or two, with a modified form of the same kind of surprise, not to say terror, which both Mrs. Penfold and Perran had exhibited when they first saw her.

"What is the matter? Why do you look at me in such a manner?" she asked, now with unconscious imperiousness.

"I was frightened, miss, for you look as if you'd walked out of a picture-frame," replied the girl, hurriedly; "but 'twas a mistake I made. You're flesh and blood as much as I am, ain't you, miss?"

"I hope so," was the slightly impatient reply.

She had seemed to be on the brink of a more or less important discovery, and then to be told that she looked as though she had walked out of a picture-frame, was, to say the least, very disappointing.

The girl's next remark, however, was equally puzzling, for she seemed to shrink a little as she said,—

"You hope so, miss; aren't you sure?"

"Sure of what?" asked Elsie, who had forgotten the form of the girl's remark.

"Why, sure that you are flesh and blood, miss, like other folks!" questioned Tamzen, eagerly.

"Of course I am! What rubbish you are talking, and Mrs. Penfold will be waiting dinner for me."

Whereupon Tamzen led the way to the room where the mistress of the castle was just going to begin her repast.

"I didn't wait, you see," observed the old lady, when the girl took the vacant chair placed for her; "though ten minutes wasn't long to give you."

"No; particularly if you consider the distance between this room and mine. But I am glad you did not wait; you must feel very tired after your long drive," responded the girl.

"I am tired," was the answer.

Then, a few seconds afterwards, she asked, with her usual abruptness,—

"How do you like your room?"

"I had scarcely time to look at it," replied Elsie, quietly; "but it seemed large and comfortable. Do any of the windows command a view of the sea?"

"Yes, sea and land too," returned the mistress of Trebartha, with a slight expression of annoyance. "It is one of the finest bedrooms in the Castle—quite as good as mine that is next to it."

"Oh! I am glad it is near yours," responded Elsie, warmly. "I shall feel so much more comfortable if I know that you are not far from me!"

Her winning smile and her ingenuous ways gave a warmth to this speech of which she was unconscious, and Mrs. Penfold's yellow cheek slightly flushed, and a softened expression came over her wooden face, making it for the moment human.

She uttered no remark at the moment, however, and the two men who waited upon them moved about noiselessly, and handed one dish after another after the manner of exceptionally well-trained servants.

Dinner lasted a long while, though there were only two at table, but it was evidently the custom at Trebartha for a great many dishes to be prepared for the table of the mistress, even though many of them were sent away untasted.

When the servants had left the room Mrs. Penfold turned her chair to the fire, and with a plate of large, purple grapes on her lap, and a glass of port on a small table by her side, motioned to Elsie to follow her example by taking the low chair opposite her.

The girl obeyed, sleepily.

She was very tired, and the long, monotonous dinner had wearied her intensely, while the howling wind which shrieked round the battlemented building made her give occasional little shivers, not because she was cold, but she thought of what her condition might have been had she been outside, instead of inside, Trebartha Castle.

But above the shrieking of the wind she thought she could discern another sound, and she at length asked, curiously,—

"Are we far from the sea? I fancy I hear the sound of the waves."

"Probably you do, as they break at the foot of the Castle," was the laconic answer.

"Do they indeed? That is a surprise for me."

"There are a good many surprises for you in this place," was Mrs. Penfold's next remark; "but before you meet them I want you to make me a promise."

"What is it?" asked Elsie, with justifiable suspicion.

"I want you to promise that whatever happens you will not leave secretly and without saying good-bye, as you left Monkhill."

"I don't think your last remark a fair one," returned Elsie, rousing herself. "I left Monkhill as I did to save Miss Birch as well as myself the pain of parting. The decision that we must part was hers, not mine, and I could do nothing but comply."

"I don't blame you, don't think it," said her companion, promptly; "but that kind of thing cannot happen here, and I want you to give me your word of honour that you will not leave Trebartha without my knowledge." And, after a pause, she added, "nor without my consent."

Elsie laughed, though, had she realised it, there was very little to laugh about.

Then she said,—

"I will promise you half of what you ask. I will not leave Trebartha intentionally and for good without your knowledge, but I won't promise to wait for your consent."

"Very well!"

And the mistress of Trebartha gave her a shrug, which meant a very great deal; then she added,—

"I accept your word. I know you will keep it!"

CHAPTER XXL

A MORNING AT TREBARTHA.

ELSIE had experienced so many changes during the last few months, and had met with so much to pain and surprise her, that when she opened her eyes at Trebartha Castle the morning after her arrival, she wondered vaguely and drowsily whether she was really awake or only dreaming.

She had disappointed Mrs. Penfold the previous night by saying that her room was comfortable enough; now she found that it might more correctly be termed magnificent.

The shape and properties of the room were striking.

Not only was it exceedingly large, but one end of it was rounded outwards, and three windows, with more stonework than glass about them, filled this side of the apartment. Although a large fire had been made up when she went to bed, it had long since burned out, and the room felt very cold; so cold, indeed, that it required some resolution to spring up and dress herself.

"I miss my early cup of tea that I used to get at Monkhill," she thought, with a little sigh; and I don't like to order it here, lest they should think I am giving unnecessary trouble."

But as the thought passed through her mind she heard a light tap at her door, and on opening it, she found Tamzen standing with a tray in her hand, upon which was a large cup of tea and a thin slice of bread-and-butter.

"Oh! that is what I was just wishing for," Elsie said, impulsively; and I'll have some hot water to wash in, please—I feel half frozen!"

"Do you now, dear? I'll light the fire. It's fine and cold this morning; it's a hard frost, and the snow won't melt. There, now, that'll burn; and I'll bring you the hot water. It's as much as you'll do to keep warm to-day!"

Elsie smiled. It was not the first time she

had been addressed as "dear" since her brief sojourn in Cornwall, and she was beginning to observe that it was the ordinary way of speaking when people meant to be kind to her.

As soon as she was dressed she went to the windows, drew up the blinds, and there stood lost in wonder, not unmixed with awe, at the wild grandeur of sea and land which lay before her.

She stood here so long, and she was so lost in bewilderment at the strange feeling that filled her heart, that she forgot the light of time.

She did not hear the door open, nor a voice call her the name under which she was here known by, and it was not until a hand was laid upon her arm that she turned and met the face of Mrs. Penfold, who was looking at her with gravely scrutinising eyes.

Effie did not start, she did not appear surprised; she was rather like a person in a state of clairvoyance, who, with eyes open, seemed rather to be looking inward and reading what was written on her own brain than to take notice of what was passing around her.

"Miss Heath, what is the matter with you?" asked Mrs. Penfold, a little anxiously.

"I seem to have seen it all before," replied the girl, closing her eyes tightly, as though the more clearly to recall some vague and far away memory.

Mrs. Penfold's countenance slightly changed, but she said, in a matter-of-fact tone,—

"You probably have seen the same view, though from another point before now. Scores of tourists come to Cornwall every year, and artists swarm over the place, till they must have carried away every rock and fern and bit of lichen on canvas."

"No, it isn't that; I feel that I have really been here. It isn't that I have seen pictures of this view; no, it is something far back in my life like a nursery song. But it must be a mistake on my part. The place where I was found by the side of a dead woman was far away from here, and I cannot say that I have a distinct memory of that event, and I can remember nothing before it."

"You were found by the side of a dead woman!" repeats Mrs. Penfold, and her lips became parched, and her tongue seems to cleave to the roof of her mouth.

"Yes," is the absently-uttered reply.

"Where?" asks the elder lady.

"On the Shirley Hills, in Surrey," answered Effie, as though she were under the influence of the mesmerist.

"The woman, you say, was dead?" continued Mrs. Penfold, with seeming calmness. "Were there any papers, or money, or ornaments found upon her?"

"I don't know," was the still dreamy reply; "but there could not have been, because they would have sent me to the Union if the kind gentleman who found me had not taken me to his own home, and adopted me as his own child."

"And you know nothing more about the woman who died when you were with her?" questioned the mistress of Trebartha, anxiously.

"No," replied Effie, with a sigh; "except that she was old—old enough to be my grandmother, I have been told."

"And you remember nothing of her yourself?" asked her companion.

But the girl shook her head, breathed a deep sigh, and then roused herself as though from an unnatural sleep.

"I cannot imagine what has come over me," she said, a few seconds afterwards, in her usual tone. "This place gives me such strange fancies and feelings; but you want your breakfast, Mrs. Penfold, and I have been keeping you here in the cold."

"I am never kept by anyone where I don't want to stay," was the somewhat ungracious answer; "but, come along; you are hungry no doubt; young people always are hungry."

Then she led the way from the room, feeling

well assured that she would learn nothing more at present about Effie's early days.

Breakfast was served in the same room in which they had dined the previous night, and the young lady, from where she sat, could look out of the windows.

But they commanded no extensive view like those of her bedroom. They were on another side of the Castle, and had only before them a walled garden, now completely covered with snow.

This garden in tempestuous weather was the only place in which the inmates of the Castle could take exercise, for on two sides of the wall there was a covered promenade, on which were always to be found a few rough garden chairs.

The two ladies ate their breakfast almost in silence. They had both of them much to think about; and the large fire made the room warm and enjoyable.

When she had finished, Mrs. Penfold took a seat by the fire, and advised Effie to follow her example.

"I hope you won't find this room as stuffy as Mrs. Maltby's study," said the old lady, with a smile; "but if you do, there is the rest of the Castle open to you, though I am afraid some parts of it will be unpleasantly cold."

"I think this room is very cosy," returned Effie; "but we don't get a view of the sea from it," she added, regretfully, "and I confess that the restless water has a fascination for me."

"We get quite enough of the sea at Trebartha, my dear, as you will find before the winter is over," replied the old lady, with a harsh laugh; "and as for the wind, it is often so strong that you can't stand against it, and in a storm you will be inclined to fear that the Castle is going to tumble about your ears."

Effie laughed, for this kind of thing was quite outside her experience, and she would at the present moment have infinitely preferred roaming about and exploring the Castle and neighbourhood to sitting in this room, with nothing more romantic in her immediate surroundings than if she had been living in London.

"What are you going to do with yourself to-day?" asked Mrs. Penfold, after awhile.

"That will depend upon you," replied Effie.

"What would you like me to do?"

"Anything that pleases yourself," was the answer.

"Have you any letters for me to write?" asked Effie.

"No. I don't favour my friends with many letters, and what they do get I write myself."

"Is there any sewing that you would like me to do?" was the more hesitating question.

"There are plenty of fingers to sew without yours or mine troubling themselves," responded Mrs. Penfold, sharply. "Perran works for me; Tamzen will sew for you, she will look after your wardrobe, too; you only have to amuse yourself, and sometimes to amuse me."

"How shall I amuse you this morning?" asked Effie, trying to smile and to speak lightly.

"By taking care of yourself," was the answer.

"I don't feel inclined to move from here for awhile, and then I have a good many things to attend to; but you can go for a walk, or get a book from the library, only take care of yourself if you go out. We are about four hundred feet above the sea, and you wouldn't be worth pulling out if you were blown into it. Until you know the locality I think you had better take Tamzen with you."

But Effie was inclined to take her first walk alone, and she said as much; then she went off to her own room to dress for it.

It was not until she got out of Trebartha Castle that she realised what a fine battlemented structure the building really was. And now she saw that only one wing was in general use, though the part which was closed up did not show any signs of decay.

"I suppose the Penfolds were people of importance in their day," she thought, as she began to descend the steep carriage drive by which they had arrived on the previous night; "but I am deplorably ignorant of the history of this part of the world. My object now is to get

to the sea, and certainly this road does not lead to it."

She paused, looked about her, unconscious that a servant had been deputed to follow her to warn her of danger; and perceiving an opening in the stone "hedges," as they are here called, which looked like a narrow lane leading back in the direction of the castle, though not close to it, she took the turning and walked on, until the winding path brought her to the edge of a cliff.

Involuntarily an exclamation of delight, not unmixed with fear, escaped her, for she looked upon a scene which she might have searched the world in vain to rival.

Twenty miles of cliff, a hundred of rolling water, a score or more of bays, each with their own golden sands and gleaming promontory, all lay stretched before her; and she, giddy with the sight, and realising more vividly than when she was in the castle the immense height of the cliffs on which she stood, leaned her arms upon the stone hedge, and bent her head in humble and mute admiration of the great Creator.

The stone hedges in Cornwall have rarely or never any mortar or cement in them.

As a rule, they are unheaven blocks of sandstone, slate, serpentine, granite, or conglomerate, according to the geological formation of the immediate locality; and these, with little regard to size, are piled one upon another, until a wall the required height, and some two or three feet wide, is made; loose earth is then thrown over the whole, and nature does the rest.

The rain comes, and the frost, and the snow, and the seasons change; the stones stand by their own weight, the once loose earth, and the weeds and grasses that spring up, bind them together, and so long as the land upon which they are built does not give way, they may remain here, and be used as paths, as well as fences, for ages.

But the land on this iron-bound coast is always being worn away.

No matter how bold a front the cliffs may present, no matter how stubbornly they resist the tread of their enemy, century by century finds some change, though it be but the change of a few inches, or a few feet, and so the work goes on.

This stone wall, against which Effie was leaning, was not the first of the kind that had been built round the seaward side of Trebartha Castle.

The cliff had been slowly but surely worn away, as its base had sunk like a huge monster falling upon its own knees, and all that was superincumbent had sunk with it. One of these stone hedges had disappeared into the sea; the second was now tottering on the very verge of the precipice, some portion of it being already gone, while the intervening field was so steep as to be practically useless to man or beast, and this third hedge had been built some twenty years ago as a necessary precaution for the coastguards, one of whom was usually to be found in the neighbourhood of Trebartha.

The stones of the hedge must have previously felt a great downward attraction, for Effie was not leaning heavily against them; but she suddenly felt as though she were sliding forward, and the instinct of self-preservation made her fling herself backwards, just as the big stones tumbled one after another down the steep slope to the wall still hanging over the abyss, a portion of which in their mad career they carried into the sea with them.

"That was a narrow escape, miss," said the man who followed her.

"It was indeed," gasped the girl, still pale with terror. "Does this kind of thing often happen?" she asked, nervously.

"Not often, miss. This wall has stood for twenty years, but it's bound to go just as Trebartha herself is bound to go, sooner or later."

He looked affectionately at the castle as he spoke, as though he had an affection for the very stones of which it was built.

Effie had in a measure recovered from her fright by this time. Something in the old man's

voice and manner interested her, and she felt curious to ask a few questions which it was probable he could answer.

"What is the name of that patch of yellow sand down there?" she asked, pointing to what looked like a tiny bay.

"That is Trebartha Steps," he replied.

She repeated the name, wondering.

"It goes by that name because it used to be got at by steps," he volunteered; "but there's another way round that is easier to get by, and there's wonderful caves down there, some that go nobody knows where. 'Tis a wonderful place is Trebartha Steps, but it won't do for you to go there alone, miss."

"No, I don't think it will," replied Elsie, with a smile. "Indeed, I think this one adventure has been quite sufficient for this morning."

Then she thanked him for the information he had given her, and she retraced her steps to the castle.

She went direct to her own room, still feeling greatly unnerved by the falling away of a portion of the wall upon which she had been leaning.

Also the memory of the cliffs, and of the rambling height above the sea at which she was living, exercised an almost painful influence over her; while that strange, haunting feeling that she had expressed to Mrs. Penfold of having seen it all before in some former phase of existence grew stronger instead of weaker, as she saw more of Trebartha.

"I won't give way to this," she said to herself resolutely, as she turned from the window and took off her hat. "If I stand looking over the cliffs like this I shall at last find their influence too great for my powers of resistance, and shall end by flinging myself over them. No, I'll go to the library and get a stirring novel, and forget my own perplexities in reading about those of other people. Ah, me! I wonder what Lionel Denison is thinking of!"

Her thoughts were still full of the high cliffs, and of the guardian who had not recognized her; and she left the room and walked down a corridor to the door which had been pointed out to her as leading into the library.

She had every reason to suppose that Mrs. Penfold was still in the room in which they had had breakfast.

And without having been exactly told so she quite understood that, besides the mistress of the castle and herself, there were only servants in the place.

So she opened the door and walked into a large though not too well-lighted room, the walls of which were covered with shelves and cases filled with books, with the exception of two large panels between three windows, upon which hung two life-size portraits in oil.

If Elsie's mind had not been so completely occupied, she would have looked about the room with more curiosity than she now showed, and she would have perhaps have wondered to see a large fire burning in the grate.

But this did not occur to her.

The cliffs still exercised a fascination for her. She remembered how the big stones had bounded down the steep incline till the sound of their fall was lost to her straining ear, and she now walked straight to one of the windows to look out, and see if from here she could get a view of the spot.

"Miss Heath!"

The voice was the voice of a man—a voice, too, which at one time she had known but too well, and with a start of anger, rather than of fear, she turns and meets the humble, but impassioned gaze of Clarence Malby.

"Miss Heath, forgive me; let us be friends," he says, with seeming contrition, and he holds out his hand, not aggressively, but as one sincerely suing for pardon.

It is not in Elsie's heart to be really hard and unforgiving to anyone, but her womanly instinct and maiden modesty warn her to beware of Clarence, and she is turning away without uttering a word when a cry of involuntary surprise escapes her.

She sees her own face and her own figure before her, not reflected in a looking-glass, but seeming to be walking out of a picture frame; and some of the same terror that had seized Mrs.

Penfold and Perran when they first met her in London came over herself now, and though she did not faint she shrank from the portrait with absolute fear, for it seemed to her excited imagination that she was actually looking upon her own double.

CHAPTER XXII.

LIONEL MAKES A DISCOVERY.

WHEN Charlie Birch woke the morning after the ball, and remembered what she had said to Elsie, she felt thoroughly ashamed of herself. Never in her life had she so completely lost her temper.

The loss of dignity involved in quarrelling with a girl, and threatening to turn her out of her house because the man whom she herself loved had proposed honourable marriage to her, was very great, indeed; and it was increased rather than lessened by the fact that the girl had refused the offer of the man in question.

"I shall be laughed at and sneered at by everybody who hears of my insane conduct," she reflected, miserably; "I shall become a byword to the whole county if Elsie goes away now. No, she must not go. I can never again love her as I have loved her, that is not possible, though the fault is none of hers; but I must tolerate her until this affair has blown over; and I may get her married to young Carew or to that man with whom she talked and danced so much last night. And now I must eat some very unpalatable humble pie, or my lady will take herself off, for she is as proud as Lucifer."

After this she made an effort to rise, but her limbs ached, partly with fatigue, but principally from a bad cold which she had caught in coming home the previous night.

Then she yawned, for she had not slept well; her conscience had been too uneasy for that, and the aching pain that gnawed her heart told her only too ruthlessly that even though Harry Kingswood cared nothing for her she cared far too much for him.

We are never in a hurry to begin a task that is distinctly disagreeable.

Charlie told herself that she must get up and must say something apologetic to Elsie before breakfast, but her reluctance to do either was so great that it was more than an hour after she resolved to do so before she began to act upon her resolution.

Then she rang for her bath to be got ready, and she was slow in dressing, so that it was not far from midday before she slowly made her way to the room which Elsie had hitherto occupied.

She did not know what to say or how to begin her apologetic discourse, for she did not wish to confess herself altogether in the wrong, and she had no manner of doubt that Elsie was justly indignant at the manner in which she had been assailed, and had received notice to quit.

"I suppose I should have been very angry if I had been in her place," thought Charlie, as she tapped at the bedroom door; "indeed, I know I should. Of course, I have been wrong, and I may as well say so frankly, and ask her to forgive me."

Then she knocked again, and receiving no answer, opened the door.

The room was empty of living occupant. True, the bed had been slept in, and the tray, with a cup, saucer, and plate on it, showed that Elsie, like herself, had had early tea.

But the appearance of two large trunks, locked and addressed, though not corded, told the young mistress of Monkhill that she was going to be taken at her word, and that Elsie had made every preparation for leaving the house.

"She is waiting downstairs for me, I suppose," she sighed. "I almost wish she would go without saying a word. I never in my life felt so small and contemptible as I do now."

This state of feeling was so unlike Charlie's normal condition that it would not long continue, and she roused herself and went to seek the injured girl, intending to say a few words of

apology and to treat the whole affair as a bit of bad temper on her own part, occasioned by over-fatigue.

On reaching the hall her eyes involuntarily glanced at the table, upon which letters and cards were often left, and in another moment she held Elsie's parting note in her hand.

Her hastily uttered wish was gratified—there would be no painful scene, no unpleasant leaving-taking; Elsie was gone, and the tone of the letter she had left behind showed Charlie how harshly she felt she had been treated.

"And she has gone without any money!" was Charlie's first thought.

"She has gone to Isolt Greatrex," was her second, "and she will tell her how I have ill-used her, and she will excite her sympathy, and probably end by becoming her stepmother. But, no, it is unjust of me to say that. Elsie is not mercenary, and in this matter I have not behaved well to her."

She went into the breakfast-room and took her seat at the head of the table, but she was alone.

Mrs. Ridgeway had sent an apology for her absence. She had caught a severe cold at the ball, and was afraid she would have to send for the doctor, so Charlie was left to entertain herself.

Her first impulse had been to order Elsie's boxes to be sent off without delay to London, and to take no further notice of the letter, beyond sending a cheque for the salary due.

But kinder feelings soon asserted themselves. She was naturally just and generous.

In her heart she was fond of Elsie, and though this feeling was rather kept in the background at present it had its influence on her future conduct.

It was not, however, till late in the afternoon that she resolved to telegraph to Elsie, saying there had been a great misunderstanding, and asking her to return.

A letter would have reached Palace Gardens almost as soon as this telegram, because a groom had to ride to Tiverton with it before it could be sent; but Charlie was in no humour to write a letter, and she fancied also that it would not meet with the same prompt attention, for she had ordered the groom to pay for a reply.

No reply came, but this was not wonderful.

There would be sure to be one the next day, however, and Charlie slept soundly that night, feeling that she had done all that could be expected of her to atone for her hasty words.

The snow which Elsie had first observed as she was on the way to Cornwall had not been partial, and it had come down so heavily in the neighbourhood of Monkhill that Charlie, when she looked through her window the next morning, felt sure that Elsie would not travel from London that day.

Mrs. Ridgeway still kept her bed, and Charlie was not only thrown on her own resources, but had no one at all to whom she could freely express the thoughts that were in her mind.

Considering the state of the weather she was not a little surprised in the afternoon to see a carriage drive up to the house, and two gentlemen alight.

There were two, she knew, but she had only eyes for one.

She felt very angry with him. It would have been a great relief to her feelings to have been able to fling one of the sofa cushions at his head; but she would not under any consideration have declined to see the culprit.

Pride alone would have kept her from doing that, and in her heart there was still the hope that Harry Kingswood would yet learn to love her.

Learn! There was no learning needed, she assured herself—he loved her. She was convinced before Elsie came in his way that he loved her, and now she was gone he would surely return to his first love.

A very pretty way of putting the matter, though its accuracy might well be doubted; but Charlie's love was stronger than her pride, and

she would not refuse Harry if he proposed to her, even though she knew he had been refused by Effie.

He did not know that she knew it, of that she was well aware, and she determined that the knowledge should never reach him.

She shook hands with him and with Mr. Denison when they came into the drawing-room, and then she began to talk about the weather and to express her wonder at their venturing out on such a day.

"Well, the fact is, the guests at Trevelyan Court are all going away, we among the number; and I—that is, Denison—wanted to see Miss Heath, and I thought I should like to say goodbye to you before leaving the neighbourhood."

"It's very kind of you," said Charlie, a trifle bitterly. "I suppose you are not going to the Antipodes?"

"Well, I don't know," he replied, awkwardly. "It may be a very long time before we meet again."

Charlie's face became very pale, and she bit her lips to try to keep some colour in them.

"How is Miss Heath?" asked Denison, who again and again had looked at the door, expecting Effie to appear.

"I—I don't know; very well, I think," replied Charlie, awkwardly.

They had both of them come to see Effie, that was but too clear, and they had only asked for her because she was the mistress of the house.

"You don't know! Isn't she here?" asked Lionel Denison, with sudden alarm.

"No, she went to London yesterday," was the answer.

"She told me that I was sure to find her here," asserted Lionel, in a tone which made Charlie open her eyes, then say, calmly, and with some displeasure,—

"That was a very extraordinary statement to make."

"It did not appear so at the time," replied Mr. Denison, speaking more calmly, and with some dignity; "but perhaps you will tell me where Miss Heath is to be found?"

"Oh, yes, certainly; I have no desire to hide Miss Heath," she returned, with scarcely veiled anger.

"What is it?" she asked, sharply, turning to a servant who came into the room.

The man presented a telegram on a salver and retired, and Charlie, though she longed to read it, threw it carelessly on the table by her side.

"Was there ever such self-denial?" asked Harry Kingswood, with a laugh. "Don't let us keep you from enjoying the contents of that mysterious envelope."

Something in his glance, she knew not what, seemed to dare her to read the telegram before he went away, and she accepted the mute challenge and opened it.

But when she had read the message her eyes swam, the paper fell from her trembling hand, and she would have fallen but for the cushions that supported her.

Kingswood caught up a fan and tried to revive her by its aid, and both of the gentlemen eagerly asked what ailed her.

She pointed to the paper, and said,—

"Read!"

And Lionel Denison did so.

The message was sent from Miss Greatrex, Palace Gardens, Kensington, to Miss Birch, Monkshill, Devon, and ran as follows:—

"Effie is not here; has not been here, neither do I expect her. Your telegram is an enigma to me."

"Effie!" repeated Lionel Denison, his face agitated, and with a look in his eyes which seemed to demand an explanation, "who is Effie?"

"Miss Heath," replied Charlie, faintly.

"Impossible!" said Lionel, answering the thought in his own mind, rather than speaking to her.

And he hid his face in his hands for a time, as though the bare suggestion were too much for him.

"There is nothing impossible about it," retorted Charlie, rousing herself; "Effie is Miss Heath's Christian name; she went away yester-

day morning before I was down, and she left a note behind her saying she was going to Miss Greatrex, and desiring me to send her luggage after her. I telegraphed yesterday begging her to return, and this is the answer."

"And where is she?" asked Kingswood, curiously.

Charlie shrugged her shoulders.

She was sincerely anxious about her ill-used friend, but she was not pleased to see that anxiety shared by Mr. Kingswood.

"Will you let me look at the letter which Miss Heath left behind her?" asked Denison, at length.

"Certainly not," was the emphatic answer, "the letter concerned only Miss Heath and myself."

Lionel Denison took out some letters and papers from his own pocket, and selecting what he wanted, he looked long and earnestly at a girl's photograph.

"It is like, and yet unlike," he said, musingly. Then handing it to Charlie, he asked, "Do you know that face, Miss Birch?"

"Of course I do," was the immediate rejoinder; "it is a portrait of Miss Heath. I saw one like it in her desk the other day, and I remarked then how greatly she had changed since it was taken."

"Then I have found her!" exclaimed Lionel, while his handsome face became illuminated with joy. "Just imagine, Kingswood, that I should spend a whole evening with the poor child, and yet should not recognise her. I wonder if she recognised me!"

"How should she?" returned the other brusquely; "you have told me she was a baby when you last saw her."

"So she was; but she must have known the name. Yes, yes, I fear she must have recognised me."

"Fear!" repeated Kingswood aggressively. He did not at all like the turn affairs had taken, and he felt inclined to be very disagreeable.

But Lionel paid no heed to his remark. He turned to Charlie and said,—

"Miss Birch, I throw myself upon your good nature to help me to find Effie. She belongs to me. I found her when she was a very little child, half buried in heather, by the side of a dead woman. I adopted her, and though I have been very many years abroad I have had her well educated and tenderly cared for. From a mistaken belief that she was an obstacle to my happiness she left my house on the day of my return to England, and from that hour to this I have sought her in vain."

"And are you the guardian of whom she sometimes speaks as though he were some demigod?" asked Charlie, incredulously.

His face flushed, but he made no answer except to ask earnestly,—

"You will help me to find her?"

"Of course I will," was the prompt reply: "tell me what I can do."

"You can tell me why she went away," he returned; "that will be the first step towards finding her."

Charlie blushed, and her face became troubled. She would not so much mind telling Lionel Denison why she quarrelled with Effie, but Harry Kingswood must never know it.

And just then Kingswood said confidently,

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Send at once, get health and strength, and you'll wonder why you never sent before.

"Yes, you must tell us, Charlie; we'll find her, wherever she is."

"Finding her will be my work," said Lionel Denison quietly, but firmly; "she belongs to me, and I don't want your help, Kingswood."

"In that case I'll take myself off," was the offended retort, and he would have been as good as his word if Charlie had not said quickly,—

"No, don't go. I have something important to tell you, and you will find a fire in the library, if you will wait there a little while."

And Kingswood went thither in no good humour.

"I don't trust him," said Lionel, as he left the room; "he recognised Elsie, he knew who she was—I feel sure that he did; and he never told me."

Charlie was of the same opinion, but she did not give expression to her thoughts, for she felt that circumstances were working in her favour.

"Certainly she would do all in her power to help Mr. Denison to find Elsie and to keep her, too."

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

A MAN, on being commiserated with by a friend because his wife had left him, replied, "Oh, don't pity me till she comes back!"

"NELLIE, just look at that man over there. I don't think I ever saw anyone so plain." "Hush, dear; you forget yourself."

"DARKEST girl of all!" he exclaimed, after learning that she was inclined to favour his suit. "All!" she echoed. "Then there must be others." And that was his finish.

"HAVE you any nice light bread?" asked a prospective customer. "Yes'm," replied the baker's boy; "we've some nice pound loaves that weigh only ten ounces."

BITA: "Did you say 'This is so sudden!' when Jack finally proposed?" Nita: "No. I intended to, you know, but I was so frustrated that I forgot and cried 'At last!' instead."

ASSISTANT: "What about this article on 'The Most Intelligent Baby in the United Kingdom'?" Editor: "Send it back. Want to offend every young mother in the country?"

MABEL: "Did you notice how badly the carpet was worn in one spot in Ethel's front-room?" Stella: "I suppose she did it standing under the mistletoe."

"BILLSON's boy has got to be an officer in the Navy," said Mrs. Sells to a friend. "Well, well," replied the friend, "I s'pose he'll wear epiphets on his shoulders now?"

HENRY: "Emilly, these biscuits aren't the kind that—" Mrs. Henpekt (glaringly): "Go ahead, Henry; go on!" Henry: "That I used to get down in Egypt in the war."

THE GIRL: "Why don't you give your husband some collar-studs for Christmas?" The Wife: "Oh, he loses them so quickly that he feels he's paying for something he didn't get."

"HERE is a girl who shot a man just because he tried to embrace her," he said. She shrugged her shoulders. "I should not know how to use a revolver even if I had one," she replied carelessly. And then—

"You are quite run down," said the facetious cyclist to the man he had knocked over. "You ought to take something." "I will," said his victim, jumping up. "I'll take your name and address."

LAWYER: "What is your age, madam?" Fair Witness: "I am—er—that is—er—" Lawyer (sarcastically): "Kindly remember, madam, that every moment you lose now will not be to your advantage."

"THIS is the new tandem, is it?" asked the fair maiden. "How much will it weigh with the attachments all on?" "With all the attachments on that it needs," he whispered in her ear, "it weighs about 115 pounds more than it does now."

MRS. DE FASHION: "Where's the morning paper?" Mr. De F.: "What on earth do you want with the morning paper?" Mrs. De Fashion: "I want to see if the play we witnessed last night was good or bad."

READY for all that might befall, the female detective prepared to venture forth on the track of the desperate criminal. At the threshold she paused and cast one more look back. "Is my disguise on straight!" she asked.

"THIEF!" she cried scornfully. "No, no!" he exclaimed pleadingly. "Anything but that!" "Thief!" she repeated. "A thief takes so little it is hardly missed, an embezzler takes all that is within reach, and a financier takes so much it cannot be counted. You stole but one." He is now a financier.

"WHY do you carry your purse in your hand instead of in your pocket?" he asked. "For economy," she replied. "If a pickpocket ever got to my pocket he'd more than likely tear my gown, while if he grabs my purse out of my hand, the loss would be only threepence, some stamps, and a postage stamp."

OLD LADY: "There is one thing I notice particularly about that young man who calls to see you. He seems to have an inborn, instinctive respect for woman. He treats every woman as though she were a being from a higher sphere, to be approached only with the utmost delicacy and deference." Granddaughter (sweet eighteen): "Yes, he's horribly bashful."

MRS. MIMMS: "Mary, it was one o'clock this morning when you got in. I heard you." Mary: "Well, ma'am, if I was you I'd take something to make me sleep better. I took my shoes off down in the kitchen and didn't make no more noise than a cat would. I've been kind of worried about you for a good while."

HOSTESS (to five-year-old guest): "Does your father say grace before dinner, Margie?" Margie: "I don't know. What's grace?" "Why, saying grace is returning thanks for what we have to eat. "My pa doesn't have to. He always pays cash for everything we have."

HOUSEHOLDER: I am going to move to the suburbs next Monday, and I'd like you to do the job." Mover: "How many loads?" "I don't know. You moved me once, you may remember." "Yes; I needed three wagons then to get through; but that was some years ago. Have you moved since?" "Yes, indeed, half a dozen times." "Hum; I guess one wagon will carry all you have left."

THE heroine turned like a hunted tigress brought to bay. "Why do you pursue me!" she hissed. "Because!" replied the villain, craftily. But persecution had transformed Marguerite Vere de Vere. She was no longer the intensely womanly woman she had hitherto been. "That is no good reason at all!" she shrieked, and Sir Roderick Guy de Cavendish slunk away, crushed and humiliated.

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SOCIETY.

THE Queen Regent of Spain accompanied by King Alfonso, will pay a visit to the French capital in the spring.

THE Tear is an accomplished whistler, and sometimes performs variations on national airs for the entertainment of his intimate friends.

THE Crown worn by the King of Roumania is made of metal from the cannon that were captured from the Turks by the Roumanians at Plevna in 1877.

THOUGH the German Emperor employs Berlin tailors, he believes in giving provincials employment also. In every important town there is a Court tailor, who occasionally has the honour of supplying the Emperor with a uniform.

IT is stated at the Court of Athens that the Princess of Wales, with Princess Victoria, will pay another visit to her brother in March, and rumours of the latter's betrothal to her cousin of Crete are again revived.

THE Duchess of Albany and her children, the Duke of Albany and Princess Alice, were residing at Stuttgart until they came to England, on a visit to the Queen, where they will stay for about three weeks. The Duchess of Albany and her children will pay a brief visit to the Queen of the Netherlands and the Queen-Mother at the Hague, this month, when on their way back to Stuttgart, which place is to be their residence until the end of May.

A FEW years ago the Emperor William of Germany took steps to have the milk produced on his farms at Potsdam sold at Berlin. Carts bearing his name may be seen in the streets of the capital, the drivers of which retail the fluid to anyone.

THE title of "Dowager" seems likely in the near future to become obsolete. Queen Victoria's eldest daughter was the first to resent the title of dowager, and is now known by virtue of a Royal Decree as "Empress Frederick." Queen Wilhelmina of Holland has been much disturbed by the idea of her mother being looked upon as an old lady, and has caused to be published a decree commanding that henceforth the ex-Regent is to be styled not "Queen Dowager," but "Queen Emma of the Netherlands."

THE impending betrothal of Princess Beatrice, the youngest daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Coburg, to the Grand Duke Cyril Vladimirovitch of Russia has been announced in several journals. The Grand Duke Cyril has lately been staying at Coburg, but there can be no idea of his betrothal to Princess Beatrice, their marriage being an impossibility, as they are first cousins, and such unions are strictly forbidden by the statutes of the Greek Orthodox Church. There can be no question as yet of Princess Beatrice being betrothed to anybody, for she will not be sixteen until April next.

THE Queen thoroughly enjoys the keen air at Balmoral, and even on cold days there is no fire in the room in which she sits, and more than once the cold of the dining-room at Balmoral has proved a very trying ordeal to many very delicate women obliged to appear in the orthodox décolleté dress. In all weathers, in rain and storm, and the drenching damp of a Scotch mist, Her Majesty, when at her Highland home, drives out in her open carriage, delighting in the cold air which some of her ladies find very trying. Balmoral is comfortably, but by no means magnificently furnished, and some visitors have been rather disappointed with it.

THE German Crown Prince recently shot his first red deer at Potsdam, and was warmly congratulated by his father. His Imperial Highness promises to become an excellent shot, but he is not so keen a sportsman as his father, and takes more interest in intellectual pursuits. He is a finished musician, and spends as much time as possible in studying the violin; but at the same time, he is devoted to active amusements, and is a good rider, a skilful cyclist, and a very graceful fencer. When he completes his eighteenth year he is to go to Potsdam in order to do duty with the First Prussian Foot Guards for a few months.

STATISTICS.

LONDON has 1,380 miles of streets; Paris 600. A RAILWAY will be built up the Rax Alp, which is 6,400 feet high.

LAND in this country is worth 300 times as much as it was 200 years ago.

IN proportion to its size, England has eight times as many miles of railway as the United States.

THE cost of the world's wars since the Crimean war has been £2,453,000,000, or enough to give a couple of sovereigns to every man, woman, and child on the globe.

IT has been calculated that the loss from illness averages 20,000,000 weeks of work in a year, or two and a half per cent. of the work done by the whole population between 15 and 65 years of age.

GEMS.

LEARNING unapplied is like seed put away to decay slowly on the shelf of indolence.

SUSPICION is the attribute of a weak nature. Respect all you meet till you have cause to do otherwise, and then avoid; do not condemn.

GREAT natures gain the sympathy of the world because we know instinctively that they will follow a simple, brave, direct course. It is the small nature that is unreliable.

A WRONG unrepented is always a weight on our self-respect, but one atoned for is a height in whose shadow we may view with broader, nobler charity, and more sympathetic tenderness, the faults of others, extending them a help untried goodness could never give.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CHEAP SPONGE CAKE.—Three eggs, three cups flour, two cups sugar, half a cup milk, one teaspoonful cream of tartar, half a teaspoonful soda, lemon. Bake quickly.

ALMOND PUDDING.—Blanch and pound a quarter-pound of almonds, take one pound of stale cake or sweet biscuits, scald with boiling milk, and when soaked beat it up. Add the almonds, rind of half a lemon, three eggs, quarter-pound white sugar. The pudding may be either baked or steamed, and two or three bitter almonds, pounded, improve the flavour.

SHORTBREAD.—Take half-pound flour, quarter pound butter, two ounces castor sugar, and a pinch baking soda; put butter and sugar on board, mix sugar with it; when this is done thoroughly, put the butter in among the flour, breaking little bits off, then rub all in amongst the flour; take out a spoonful of the latter and put in same quantity of rice flour, when all has been made into a round ball cut in two and make into cakes; pinch edges and fork the cake; then place on a papered oven shelf and bake half an hour; let the cake rest on another shelf which has sand spread over it; put paper bands round cakes to keep from burning.

QUEEN CAKES.—Ingredients: Quarter-pound butter, quarter-pound castor sugar, two eggs, six ounces flour, teaspoonful baking powder, pinch of salt, three ounces of glacé cherries or currants two ounces peel, one lemon. Well butter any fancy mould you may have. Cream together the butter and sugar. Then well beat the eggs, and add them gradually and alternately with the flour, into which you have mixed the baking-powder and salt. Next cut the cherries in halves, and add them. Then chop and add the peel, also the grated rind of the lemon. If liked, a few drops of vanilla may be added as well. Put the mixture into the prepared tin, and bake in a moderate oven for about twenty minutes, or until they are a pale brown.

MISCELLANEOUS.

BETWEEN the two lower falls of the Nile, rain has never been experienced.

THE Saturday afternoon holiday was the custom in this country as far back as the thirteenth century.

SPONGES are marine animals that breed in spring. The young sponges swim about for some time, but finally become fixed to rocks.

No human head was impressed on coin until after the death of Alexander the Great. All images before that time were deities.

THE salmon leaves the sea and enters fresh water in order to breed, while the eel leaves fresh water and enters the sea for the same cause.

SPAIN has greater mineral resources than any other country in Europe, including iron, copper, zinc, silver, antimony, quicksilver, lead, and gypsum.

THE Indians of the interior of Bolivia wear skirts and hats made of the bark of a tree, which is soaked in water to soften the fibre, and then beaten to make it pliable.

THE highest spot inhabited by human beings on this globe is the Buddhist cloister of Hanle, Tibet, where twenty-one monks live at an altitude of 18,000 feet.

THE partridge-canes used for the twisted and curled handles of umbrellas and walking-sticks are imported in large quantities from China and the West Indies.

NEARLY all the insects, crustaceans, worms, snails, and the like go into winter quarters; frogs and all the reptile kind hibernate by burying themselves in the mud or under stones.

IT is not generally known that there is still living in Europe a large herd of European bison. These rare animals are preserved by the Czar of Russia in the Imperial forest of Belovege, in Lithuania, and number something like 700.

FRENCH military authorities are considering the advisability of adopting a "pistol sabre"—an ordinary sabre with a small firearm in the hilt, which is discharged when the blade is pushed against a resisting surface.

THE system of vaccination is now so perfect in the Germany army that smallpox has been reduced to six or seven cases annually. All recruits are revaccinated, and there must be at least ten punctures in each arm.

A NEW way to coal locomotives is being introduced by a prominent railway. All the engineer has to do is to run his engine on a trestle, touch a button, and a tenderful of coal drops into his tender, which is weighed as it drops in.

IT is interesting to know that 4,260 species of plants are gathered and used for commercial purposes in Europe. Of these 420 have a perfume that is pleasing, and enter largely into the manufacture of soaps and soaps. There are more species of white flowers gathered than of any other colour—1,124 in all.

WHILE the sperm whale has numerous teeth on the lower jaw, the narwhale very seldom develops more than one, which, however, attains an extraordinary size. It grows out right forward, in a line with the body, until it becomes a veritable tusk, sometimes reaching a length of 10 ft.

SOME historical trees have lately come into the New York timber-market from the Wilderness battlefield of the Civil War. The bills of lading showed that the trees had been felled, and the lumber sawed there. In some of the planks the minute balls can be seen plainly, the wood directly adjacent to the bullets being discoloured or rotten, but not enough to damage the lumber.

SOME experiments recently made in Belgium tend to throw doubt on the truth of the assumption that insects are guided to flowers by the brightness of their colours. Brilliantly-coloured dahlias were covered so as to show only the discs; the butterflies and bees sought these flowers with the same eagerness and frequency as those which were fully exposed.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

C. P.—Apply to the Commissioner of Police, Scotland Yard, London.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—Bible teaching is given in a great many Board schools.

IGNORAMUS.—Major Marchand was the French officer who reached Fashoda.

W. G.—We do not think you are likely to purchase a guinea under 99s. anywhere.

COLONIAL.—There is no king in Egypt, but the Khedive or Viceroy resides at Cairo.

XMAS.—The 25th of December, 1873, fell on Thursday; the 2nd of October, 1889, on Wednesday.

BRIDE-ELKT.—We believe marriages are sometimes performed at the Registrar's Office on Christmas Day.

SCOTS GARY.—The Scots Greys are the one Scotch cavalry regiment in the regular army of the United Kingdom.

WORRIED READER.—If the widow is chargeable to the parish, so may the children be. You are not compelled to support them.

ANXIOUS LOVER.—We would advise you to endeavour to win her love on your own merits, and not on the strength of frequent and costly gifts.

WOULD-BE ACTRESS.—The theatrical profession is already overflowing with actors and actresses, who find it a very hard matter to obtain employment.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—We fear you are beginning to get tired of home; hence the little quarrels of frequent occurrence with your wife. The remedy lies entirely with yourself.

BROKEN HEARTED.—You are to be congratulated upon having "lost" the young man rather than condescended with. You will be more than foolish if you take any further notice of him.

UNCERTAIN.—Having no knowledge of your mental or physical capacities, tastes, or inclinations, it is impossible for us to point out the trade or business which will suit you best.

FANCY.—To freshen pinch, cover a hot smoothing-iron with a wet cloth, and hold the pinch firmly over it. The vapours arising will raise the pile of the pinch with the assistance of a little whisk.

M. H.—A rubbing with a cloth dipped in ammonia will remove the greasy look. Velvet collars may be treated in the same way, but must be held in front of a hot iron directly after to raise the pile.

MOLLIE.—Rub the linen well with soap, then scrape some fine chalk, and rub that also on the linen. Lay it on the grass. As it dries, wet a little, and the mildew will come out with a second application.

FADDT.—To test whether sheets are damp or not, place an ordinary tumbler between the sheets for a little while, and if they are not perfectly dry, traces of moisture will appear on the inside of the glass.

E. B.—If one is born in Scotland of English parents he is of English nationality, and if of Scotch parents in England he is of Scotch nationality; the distinction in both cases being that the man's nativity is not the same as his nationality.

ANNIE'S BROTHER.—If you wish to ship as trimmer apply to the second engineer on board; if, again, it is your desire to sail as deck hand, see the captain or the owners and sign articles at the Mercantile Marine Office in the capacity of ordinary seaman.

A DOUBTFUL READER.—You certainly should be guided to some extent by your parents' wishes. You seem to have a very happy and comfortable home, and we should think that you are very likely to regret it if you leave it now in the way you suggest.

A PAIR MODEL.—Usually the supply exceeds the demand. If you know a model, she will tell you how to proceed; if you do not, you must apply to an artist, just as you would for any other kind of work. He will either employ you or tell you where to go.

MAY BLOSSOM.—First rub with a little sweet-oil and then with very finely powdered rotten-stone, and polish with a soft chamois leather. A little paraffin mixed with the sweet oil prevents the brass from tarnishing as quickly as it otherwise would.

MAGGIE.—Fresh paint-stains can easily be removed by sponging with equal parts of ammonia and spirits of turpentine, using a piece of the same material as the dress. If the stains have been allowed to dry, rub a little unslaked lime on to soften and then sponge.

HEATHER.—Boiling water poured through will remove fresh stains. Old ones should be soaked in or rubbed with a little whisky before sending to wash. Of course chloride of lime will remove the stains, but unless very carefully used it is apt to burn holes in the fabric.

T. V. V.—The reference is to the Roman legend of the massacre of the Fabian gens (numbering 306 males, besides women and children, after having held for two years a fortified camp on the Cremera (a tributary of the Tiber) against the inhabitants of the hostile city of Veii.

MOTH AND STAR.—The reason is that the moth's eyes are organised only to bear a small amount of light. When, therefore, it comes within the light of a candle, its sight is overpowered and its vision confused, and as it cannot distinguish objects it pursues the light itself and flies against the flame.

M. Y.—The foreigner does not become enfranchised by mere residence in this country; after he has been five years in United Kingdom he can, in the prescribed form, apply to a Secretary of State for naturalisation papers, and will probably get them, but cannot compel it.

LITTLE BEN.—The only plan is to hunt them down; shake the blankets daily in which they lurk, if possible have them in open air for an hour or two, renew bedding if it is old, and wash floor under and around bed with water containing a good dash of vinegar or a little carbolic acid.

PERFUME.—The excessive use of cologne or perfumes is to the refined woman an abomination, and is considered by the majority of people a sign of vulgarity. But the delicious odour of cleanliness and a suspicion of some good extract is delightful to the senses of the person in proximity to the well-dressed woman.

COCKATOO.—Cockatoos are not very intelligent, and make poor pupils; but sit down before it and patiently repeat over and over again a word at a time the phrase you desire it to acquire; when the bird makes its first attempt to imitate you, let it have a tit-bit; it learns in that way how to earn something good for itself, and is the more readily induced to try again.

ONLY A WOMAN'S HEART.

ONLY a woman's heart, whereon

You have trod in your careless haste;

A thing at best that was easy won

What matter how dear a waste

Her life may be in the future years?

What matters it? Do not start—

It is only the sound of dropping tears

As wrong from a woman's heart.

'Tis of little worth, for it cost you taught

With a honeyed word and a smile.

Was the fault not here, if she blindly thought

You were truer than truth the while?

What if the seeds of a life-long woe

From its broken shrine upstart?

What does it matter to you? You know

It is only a woman's heart.

Only a heart to be thrown away

With the recklessness that a boy

Who, careless of pleasure and weary of play,

Would throw down a broken toy.

The world is fair and the world is wide,

And there's more in its busy mart;

(Conscience you know you have put aside)

It is only a woman's heart.

But powerless is your boasted will

To vanquish the ghost of sin.

It has spoken oft, and it whispers still

Your soul's dark chambers in;

In the drama of one life you know

You have acted the villain's part.

For you struck a hard, a cruel blow,

And it fell on a woman's heart.

Only a woman's heart, ah, well!

'Tis little, I trow, to you

Whether that heart was as false as hell,

Or as heaven itself is true.

You may hug the thought to your selfish breast

That you're skilled in deception's art;

But I brand you thief for the peace and rest

That you stole from a woman's heart.

WREACKER.—The term "Chiltern Hundreds" practically means that the Member of Parliament accepts an office under the Crown, and, therefore, vacates his seat. The office is purely nominal. It has no emoluments and no duties, but it keeps up the rule that a Member of Parliament cannot retire from his duties without consent of the Crown.

A. O. M.—The monkey temple of Benares is one of the grandest and most costly buildings in the city. The followers of Brahma hold this animal in great awe; it is sacred, and they fear and worship it as devoutly as any of the images of wood and stone. The temple is elaborately fitted up for the accommodation of numerous monkeys who are confined in it.

HARRY.—When a besieged town has surrendered and the men of its garrison are permitted to march out, carrying their arms with them, with drums beating and colours flying, they are said to have capitulated with the honours of war. That is, they are understood not to be conquered, but to be permitted to retire with the privilege of continuing the war elsewhere.

LOVER OF DANCING.—It is highly probable that dancing is the oldest form of amusement. Leaping and jumping about is the most natural way of disposing of superfluous energy and of expressing our feelings, as may be observed in children, and the earliest records show that dancing was a common form of amusement. No doubt the early form of it was more capering about.

DAD.—The modern naval ram is not a submarine vessel, but a ship of extraordinary solidity and strength, propelled by engines of great power, and armed at the prow, below the water-line, with a sharp, heavy beak, nearly pointing, and diminishing to a sloping edge on the upper side. The beak is nearly solid, and it is usually built as an independent adjunct to the ship, so that in the event of any serious collision it may be buried in its victim or carried away, leaving the ship intact.

ALL.—Mock crab makes a tasty and economical dish. Mash with a fork as much fat cheese as you may require; season with mustard, salt and pepper; now add pounded, hard-boiled yolks of eggs. Mix well, adding as much tarragon vinegar as required to mix thoroughly. If this is served with a lettuce salad, few will know it from crab itself.

GINGER.—Take one pound of raisins, the thinly pared rind of one lemon and three-quarters of an ounce of well-bruised, whole, unbleached ginger. Put these ingredients to steep in one quart of the best French brandy until the spirit has absorbed the amount of flavour you desire, then strain, and add one pound of powdered loaf sugar; agitate till dissolved, after that it is ready for use.

BITON.—The rose is the emblem of England; Scotland, the thistle, and Ireland, the shamrock (these two latter can scarcely be called flowers); France has the lily; Holland, the tulip; Wales, the leek; Egypt, the lotus; Greece, the violet; Germany, the cornflower; Finland, the linden; Saxony, the mignonette; Spain, the pomegranate; Japan, the chrysanthemum; Italy, the lily; Switzerland, the edelweiss.

JACKO.—The Mohicans was the name of a tribe of Indians in the great Algonquin family which in the seventeenth century inhabited the country now forming the south-west part of New England and that portion of New York east of the Hudson River. All traces of them have now nearly disappeared, although Cooper's celebrated novel, "The Last of the Mohicans," will cause their name to survive most of the other Indian tribes.

LOLA.—In order to be married at the registrar's office it is necessary that notice should be given to the superintendent registrars of the districts in which the parties have resided for seven days; twenty-one days thereafter certificates will be granted to them authorising the celebration of the marriage by registrar or minister as desired; the whole cost, carried out in the manner described, is 10s. 7d.

FAVORITE.—To prepare mulled claret, take one cup of claret, six whole cloves, a little grated nutmeg, one cup of boiling water, two or three tablespoonsful of white sugar, twelve whole spices, and four inches of stick cinnamon. Boil the water with the spices for ten or fifteen minutes, then dissolve the sugar in it; remove from the fire, and strain into a pitcher containing the claret.

CHERRY.—Line a plate with puff pastry, and spread with a thin layer of raspberry jam. Beat two ounces of butter to a cream; add two ounces of caster sugar and the yolks of two eggs, beat for five minutes; add two ounces of ground almonds and the whites of eggs beaten to a stiff froth. Flavour with essence of almonds, and all the tart with the mixture. Decorate with cross strips of pastry, and bake in a moderate oven for about half an hour.

FRESH FIELDS.—Seek it in the direction where your training and experience would tell in your favour, and your laudable desire to become an employer instead of being employed might be gratified—why not emigrate to New Zealand, say, where stock-raising is now becoming prosperous? Send penny stamp to Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, Westminster, London, S.W., for copy of New Zealand Handbook, read that attentively and form a decision.

A. R.—You might try careful sponging with a little clean water or ammonia and water, but there is danger that to remove the stain may injure the dye. If however, you succeed, and the sponging cause the pile of the plush to lie flat after it has dried, you may then raise the pile by directing the steam from a half empty boiling tea-kettle to play upon the flattened portion, at the same time helping it to rise with the points of a long-haired clothes brush very gently used.

THREE BALLS.—"Pawn" is a contract whereby the owner of a thing delivers it to a creditor as security for a debt contracted by himself or a third party; this contract is of great antiquity, as may be seen on referring to the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. xxxviii) and the provisions of the Mosaic Law (Exod. xlii); in modern times the superior class of money-lenders have often advanced money on pledges of plate, &c.; this was the business carried on by Lombard traders, from whom Lombard Street in London takes its name; and it is said that the three golden balls which figure over every pawnshop were taken from the armorial bearings of the Medici family; this is the generally accepted explanation of the sign among those who have traced the development of pawnbroking from the earliest ages.

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